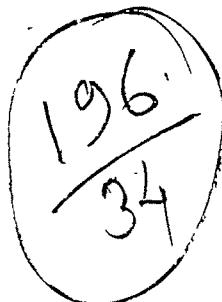


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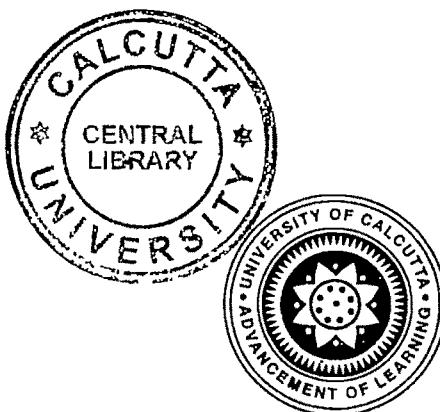
# JOURNAL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA

*Chief Editor*  
Sudeshna Chakravarti



*Editor of this Volume*  
Jharna Sanyal



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## ***Preface***

This issue of the journal covers an entire trajectory of theoretical and textual aspects of the English Literary Studies. Beginning with Derrida, we move on to postmodern subalternity encompassing issues of language, culture and identity. Voices of the marginalised resonate beyond boundaries and define a plural world order that accommodates interrogatory and analytical texts and discourses. Authors like Patrick White, Chinua Achebe and August Wilson share space with European classics in a reconstituted area of literary and cultural studies in English. Texts like *The Return of the Native* and *Pride and Prejudice* which represent the Western literary canon and form an integral part of the English literature curriculum in India have been reinterpreted to accommodate a cultural reading of Western texts.

However, the highlight of this volume are two essays by David Lester Richardson that have been reprinted from his *Literary Leaves* (1836) and *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* (1840). These two essays written by a person who taught English to young Indian students in a period of emergent social and cultural intersections between the colonizer and the colonized, document the introduction and growth of English literary studies in India. Accompanying the two essays are few poems that were written by the British men and women during their stay in India. A brief biographical note of Richardson has been prepared to give an insight into the life and works of this pioneering but marginalised figure in the history of the English literary studies in India.

Today when English is the *lingua franca* across the world blurring boundaries and transcending borders, we need to look back and retrieve certain documents to examine critically the current modes of approaching English literatures. As we do so, we are reverted to Macaulay and his arrogant espousal of the English language as a tool of colonial control in early nineteenth century India. Richardson's situatedness in this dynamic cultural site of interaction, abrogation and appropriation makes his works appropriate for serious analysis which unfortunately has not been attempted yet. We hope that this volume would contribute in evoking more than a passing interest in a figure who intellectually shaped a whole generation of young Bengali students like Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Rajnarayan Basu.

Richardson's encounter with nineteenth century Bengal and the young Bengali students can be explained by what Bill Ashcroft calls the

‘*transformation* of the global by the local and the *circulation* of the local in the global.’<sup>1</sup> On one hand, Richardson’s poems, his essays, his creations were shaped by the Indian influence and on the other his reading of Shakespeare, his choice of texts and poems affected the young Bengali students – all this reflects the dynamic interaction between the two cultures. These documents would also help us to understand the role of books and curriculum in fashioning the young minds – an issue persistently foregrounded in the writings of all colonial writers and also provide an insight into the beginnings and development of Indian Writing in English.

I am grateful to the Vice Chancellor and the Pro-Vice Chancellor (B.A. & F) for their support. I also thank the Librarian, Presidency College, Professor Jayati Gupta, Head, Department of English, Presidency College and Dr. Sanjukta Das for their cooperation in retrieving Richardson’s essays. Special thanks are due to Swami Gitatmananda and the library staff at the Library of the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark for their help. The Calcutta University Central Library staff deserves thanks for helping us out with the *Calcutta Review* article on Richardson. I would also like to thank all the members of the editorial board for their unstinted cooperation. Finally I thank the young enthusiastic DRS project-associates, Sanhita, Prasita and Subarnasree for their ungrudging help. Piyali Gupta, Junior Research Fellow in the Department of English, deserves special thanks for assisting me in the editorial work.

**Jharna Sanyal**  
15 May 2008  
University of Calcutta

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<sup>1</sup> See “Globalization, Transnation and the Utopia” in *Narrating the (Trans)Nation: The Dialectics of Culture and Identity* eds. Krishna Sen and Sudeshna Chakravarti. Kolkata: DasGupta & Co., 2008: 3)

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# Writing as Differance: Doing Derrida

*Saugata Bhaduri*

What is writing? Is it an act that gives a transparent representational form to concrete experience, or is it an act that is always incomplete and continuously in the process of becoming, of being formed? Deleuze seems to explicitly side with the latter when he says,

To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience. Literature rather moves in the direction of the ill-formed or the incomplete [...] Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of life that traverses both the livable and the lived. Writing is inseparable from becoming [...] (1)

This makes writing a potentially “dangerous supplement” to modes of ordering the lived universe, a means of expression that is always in excess of existing modes of normative knowledge. This leads one directly to Jacques Derrida, one of the foremost theoreticians of the subversive potential of writing and who can be noted to have said, as early as in a 1963 article of his, titled “Force and Signification”, that

[I]t is because writing is inaugural, in the fresh sense of the word, that it is dangerous and anguishing. It does not know where it is going, no knowledge can keep it from the essential precipitation toward the meaning that it constitutes and that is primarily, its future. (11)

Derrida develops this subversive and dangerous potential of writing as the means to probe the limits of representation through his focus on ‘grammatology’, or the study of writing, as especially in his 1967 book—*Of Grammatology*—dedicated to the subject.

In this book, Derrida begins his study of writing as a disruptive and subversive form by showing how the whole of Western metaphysics—“from the pre-Socratics to Heidegger”—has centred the question of ‘truth’ either around the ‘logos’ or around ‘speech’, thereby leading to “the debasement of writing” (3). It is in relation to free language from this metaphysical reliance on logocentrism or phonocentrism and to restore it to the ‘debased’ other of writing, that Derrida, in this book, wishes to “announce that the science of writing—*grammatology*—shows signs of liberation all over the world”, and

foresee a yet unattained future “beyond the closure of knowledge” (4). Derrida observes in the same book that the history of language has been a “history that has associated technics and a logocentric metaphysics for nearly three millennia”, but now it is finally ready to give its position over to a liberatory “new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing” (8). For Derrida, this ‘mutation’ is partly possible because of the outcomes of the linguistic turn, and partly, curiously, because of the cybernetic development. He says in *Of Grammatology*,

And, finally, whether it has essential limits or not, the entire field covered by the cybernetic *program* will be the field of writing. If the theory of cybernetics is by itself to oust all metaphysical concepts—including the concepts of soul, of life, of value, of choice, of memory—which until recently served to separate the machine from man, it must conserve the notion of writing, trace, grammè [written mark], or grapheme [...] (9)

Thus, Derrida’s theory of grammatology—or that a study of writing can liberate language from its phonocentric and logocentric bases—is not only political in intent but is also so in its being contextually rooted in contemporary late capitalistic technological innovations.

Derrida clarifies that this ‘destruction’ of the logocentric and phonocentric bases of language through a foregrounding of writing is not an outright ‘demolition’, but a more surreptitious subversive mode of what he calls ‘deconstruction’, and he says in *Of Grammatology* that “it inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the deconstruction, of all the significations that have their source in that of the logos.” (10) This introduces one to Derrida’s celebrated ‘method’ of ‘deconstruction’. Of course, one can note how Derrida later decries the way this word has been extrapolated, especially by the Anglo-American literary academia, to stand for a manualistic principle for textual analysis, which is a travesty of the anti-instrumental potential of deconstruction itself, and says in a 1982 book of his called *The Ear of the Other*,

[T]his word [deconstruction] which I had only written once or twice [...] all of a sudden jumped out of the text and was seized by others who have since determined its fate in the manner you well know. Faced with this, I myself then had to justify myself, to explain, to try to get some leverage. [...] But for me “deconstruction” was not at all the first or the last word, and certainly not a password or slogan for everything that was to follow [...] (86)

### Writing as Difference: Doing Derrida

However, to come back to the features of ‘deconstruction’ that Derrida lays down in *Of Grammatology*, one can notice that for him, though writing rends through logocentrism and phonocentrism, it does not reject what it wishes to deconstruct, but points out their fissures, their ‘crevices’, which indicate the limits of their effectiveness. Derrida says in the book,

Of course, it is not a question of “rejecting” these notions; they are necessary and, at least, at present, nothing is conceivable for us without them. It is a question at first of demonstrating the systematic and historical solidarity of the concepts and gestures of thought that one often believes can be innocently separated. [...] Since these concepts are indispensable for unsettling the heritage to which they belong, we should be even less prone to renounce them. Within the closure, by an oblique and always perilous movement, constantly risking falling back within what is being deconstructed, it is necessary to surround the critical concepts with a careful and thorough discourse—to mark the conditions, the medium, and the limits of their effectiveness and to designate rigorously their intimate relationship to the machine whose deconstruction they permit; and, in the same process, designate the crevice through which the yet unnameable glimmer beyond the closure can be glimpsed. (13-14)

Deconstruction thus operates its critique on the lines of ‘subversion’, whereby it is not a destruction of structures from the outside, but an immanent critique, one that destroys structures from within, by inhabiting the very structures that it seeks to destroy. Derrida says in the same book,

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. (24)

This is how Derrida presents grammatology, or the study of writing, as a deconstruction of the metaphysical claims made of language by logocentrism and phonocentrism, not through a frontal demolition of the metaphysical premises of ‘truth’, but though an immanent subversive critique that operates

from the within, by inhabiting the crevices of the very structures themselves. What Derrida proceeds to show next is how this subversive category of writing has been recuperated within traditional Western thinking about language.

Derrida shows that in the entire Western tradition of thinking about language, writing has always been seen as a clothing for language, and in some cases, like Saussure's, as a 'disguise' for language, and thus the entire attempt of linguistics has been to do away with writing, and restore language to a pristine, original, natural nudity. For Derrida, Saussure failed to see the figural nature of language, and the fact that he, like other luminaries of the Western tradition, based the methods of Western metaphysics on an overlooking of writing, makes, by implication, grammatology, or the study of writing, the means to deconstruct the resultant logocentric basis of Western metaphysics. He says in *Of Grammatology*,

Saussure was thus never able to think that writing was truly an image, a "figuration", a "representation" of the spoken language, a symbol. [...] My justification would be as follows: this and some other indices (in a general way the treatment of the concept of writing) already give us the assured means of broaching the deconstruction of the *greatest totality*—the concept of the *epistémè* and logocentric metaphysics—within which are produced, without ever posing the radical question of writing, all the Western methods of analysis, explication, reading, or interpretation. (45-46)

Derrida's deconstructive contention is that, ironically, language could present itself as 'original' and 'natural' only vis-à-vis writing, because no language has been untouched by an 'arche-writing'. Derrida, in the same book, wishes grammatology to bring out this arche-writing, as the "most formidable difference", which always breached 'living speech':

I would wish rather to suggest that the alleged derivativeness of writing, however real and massive, was possible only on one condition: that the "original", "natural", etc. language had never existed, never been intact and untouched by writing, that it had itself always been a writing. An arche-writing whose necessity and new concept I wish to indicate and outline here; and which I continue to call writing only because it essentially communicates with the vulgar concept of writing. The latter could not have imposed itself historically except by the dissimulation of the arche-writing, by the desire for a speech displacing its other and its double and working to reduce its difference. If I persist in calling

### Writing as Difference: Doing Derrida

that difference writing, it is because, within the work of historical repression, writing was, by its situation, destined to signify the most formidable difference. It threatened the desire for the living speech from the closest proximity, it *breached* living speech from within and from the very beginning. And as we shall begin to see, difference cannot be thought without the *trace*. (56-57)

These notions of 'trace' and 'difference', which Derrida qualifies writing as being characterized by, and which give writing its deconstructive edge, together comprise the category of 'difference', which I take up for discussion soon in this article. Before that, however, I have to take a short detour and turn to an allied issue, that which concerns the relationship between writing and psychoanalysis, because the erasure of the original 'trace' as a means to repression, and a subversive reclamation of the same through re-narrativization and rewriting has been dealt with in similar terms within psychoanalysis.

No wonder, after explaining the deconstructive capacity of writing, Derrida says in *Of Grammatology*, "Perhaps, it is now easier to understand why Freud says of the dreamwork that it is comparable rather to a writing than to a language, and to a hieroglyphic rather than to a phonetic writing." (68) In a 1966 lecture on Freud, titled "Freud and the Scene of Writing", Derrida shows further how Freudian psychoanalysis, as especially evident in the contraption of the Mystic Pad, performs the scene of writing, replete with the notion of 'trace', whose erasure brings about repression. He says,

Thus Freud performs for us the scene of writing. Like all those who write, and like all who know how to write, he let the scene duplicate, repeat, and betray itself within the scene. It is Freud then whom we will allow to say what scene he has played for us. And from him that we shall borrow the hidden epigraph which has silently governed our reading. [...] Thus, the Freudian concept of trace must be radicalized and extracted from the metaphysics of presence which still retains it [...] The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence [...] An unerasable trace is not a trace, it is a full presence, an immobile and uncorruptible substance, a son of God, a sign of parousia and not a seed, that is, a mortal germ. [...] This erasure of the trace is not only an accident that can occur here or there, nor is it even the necessary structure of a determined censorship threatening a given presence; it is the very structure which makes possible, as the movement of temporalization and pure *auto-affection*, something that can be called repression in general, the original synthesis of original repression and secondary repression, repression "itself". (229-230)

Psychoanalysis, and its extension of the ‘trace’, accords writing the dual status of either being excrement or a gem, thus foregrounding the subversive act of writing further. As Derrida says in the same article,

Writing as sweet nourishment or as excrement, the trace as seed or mortal germ, wealth or weapon, detritus and/or penis, etc.

How, for example, on the stage of history, can writing as excrement separated from the living flesh and the sacred body of the hieroglyph (Artaud), be put into communication with what is said in *Numbers* about the parched woman drinking the inky dust of the law; or what is said in *Exekiel* about the son of man who fills his entrails with the scroll of the law which has become sweet as honey in his mouth? (231)

It is this duality, it being capable to be both this and that at the same point of time, that leads to the subversive deconstructive aspect of writing, in direct connection to the psychoanalytic idea of power as phallogocentric, Derrida shows in a 1989 interview, titled “This Strange Institution Called Literature”, that the more a text is ‘written’, the more it is likely to unmask normative centrisms like phallogocentrism:

Whether it is phallogocentric or not (and that is not so easy to decide), the more ‘powerful’ a text is [...], the more it is written, the more it shakes up its own limits or lets them be thought, as well as the limits a phallogocentrism, of all authority and all ‘centrism’, all hegemony in general. (59)

Thus, the concept of ‘trace’ that Derrida’s connection of writing to psychoanalysis throws up, itself leads one to the possibility of the resistant immanent critique that deconstruction is, and with this realization one can return to the category of *difference*, that all important Derridean category of social analysis, which incidentally writing itself embodies.

In *Of Grammatology*, Derrida introduces the category of *difference* by simply stating, “*difference*, an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring” (23). However, as has already been stated, this ‘economic concept’ is connected to the notion of *trace*, and thus is present in writing in all its duplicity, and, as Derrida says in the same book, “Difference is therefore the formation of form. But it is *on the other hand* the being-imprinted of the imprint.” (63) Derrida, therefore, shows how the *trace*, which is *difference*, is at the absent origin of everything else, it, in its repetition, preceding all the metaphysical binaries of ideality and reality, intelligibility and sensibility. He says in *Of Grammatology*,

### Writing as Difference: Doing Derrida

*The trace is in fact the absolute origin of sense in general. Which amounts to saying once again that there is no absolute origin of sense in general. The trace is the difference which opens appearance [*l'apparaître*] and signification. Articulating the living upon the nonliving in general, origin of all repetition, origin of ideality, the trace is not more ideal than real, not more intelligible than sensible, not more a transparent signification than an opaque energy and no concept of metaphysics can describe it.* (65)

This is how Derrida introduces the *trace* and *difference* that underlie writing and thus constitute the deconstructive potential of grammatology. I will now move to a 1971 seminar paper of Derrida, where he elaborates upon the relationship between *writing* and *difference*.

In this paper, titled “Signature Event Context”, Derrida shows that writing is a more ‘powerful means of communication’ than oral or gestural communication, because it can ‘extend’ beyond its immediate context of articulation, both temporally and spatially:

If one takes the notion of writing in its usually accepted sense—which above all does not mean an innocent, primitive, or natural sense—one indeed must see it as a *means of communication*. One must even acknowledge it as a powerful means of communication which *extends* very far, if not infinitely, the field of oral or gestural communication. [...] The range of voice or of gesture certainly appears to encounter a factual limit here, an empirical boundary in the form of space and time; and writing, within the same time, within the same space, manages to loosen the limits, to open the *same field* to a much greater range. Meaning, the content of the semantic message, is thus transmitted, *communicated*, by different *means*, by technically more powerful mediations, over a much greater distance [...] (311)

For Derrida, a written sign is repeatable and iterable, because it is articulated when the addressee is absent, and it is read when the sender is absent. Writing, thus itself presumes a difference and deferral of communicative contexts, and in the absences of the two poles of communication at its two instants of articulation, writing *is* difference. Derrida says in the same paper that writing can itself thus deconstruct the metaphysics of presence of language:

A written sign is proffered in the absence of the addressee. How is this absence to be qualified? One might say that at the moment when I write, the addressee may be absent from my field of present perception. But is not this absence only a presence that is distant,

delayed, or, in one form or another, idealized in its representation? It does not seem so, or at very least this distance, division, delay, *différance* must be capable of being brought to a certain absolute degree of absence for the structure of writing, supposing that writing exists, to be constituted. It is here that *différance* as writing could no longer (be) an (ontological) modification of presence. My “written communication” must, if you will, remain legible despite the absolute disappearance of every determined addressee in general for it to function as writing, that is for it to be legible. It must be repeatable—iterable—in the absolute absence of the addressee or of the empirically determinable set of addressees. This iterability (*iter*, once again, comes from *itara*, *other* in Sanskrit, and everything that follows may be read as the exploitation of the logic which links repetition to alterity), structures the mark of writing itself [...] A writing that was not structurally legible—iterable—beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing. [...] All writing, therefore, in order to be what it is, must be able to function in the radical absence of every empirically determined addressee in general. And this absence is not a continuous modification of presence; it is a break in presence, “death”, or the possibility of the “death” of the addressee, inscribed in the structure of the mark [...] (315-316)

It is from this perspective that Derrida lists out four features of ‘all writing’—that it breaks with communication as the communication of presences; that it punctures the semantic or hermeneutic horizon of meaning; that it presents *dissemination* as opposed to simple polysemy; and that it renders the primacy of the context insufficient for communication. It is because of these four points that Derrida poses himself against Austin’s theory of speech acts, which accords absolute primacy to the presence of the context. Writing, on the other hand, is by definition trans-contextual, and makes the absence of the original context in its differed and deferred articulatory context its mainstay. Taking advantage of this difference that underlies writing, Derrida claims that writing thus pre-exists all modes of communication, which are all, thus, to begin with, ‘graphematic’, when he says in “Signature Event Context”, “*Différance*, the irreducible absence of intention or assistance from the performative statement, from the most ‘event-like’ statement possible, is what authorizes me, taking into account the predicates mentioned just now, to posit the general graphematic structure of every ‘communication’.” (327) Derrida gives the example of signature, which may look like a contextually-bound performative, but whose efficacy lies only in its deferred and differed iterability, its reproducibility as

### Writing as Difference: Doing Derrida

a performative in a context absent from the initial one of its writing. It should be reiterated, considering that one is speaking about iterability, that for Derrida, this deconstructive power of writing is not a direct opposition to metaphysics, but one that subverts from the within, by 'overturning' and 'displacing' rather than demolishing presences, through the use of the strategies of duplicity. Derrida says in the same paper,

Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions that it criticizes, which is also a field of nondiscursive forces. [...] Deconstruction does not consist in passing from one concept to another, but in overturning and displacing a conceptual order, as well as the nonconceptual order with which the conceptual order is articulated. For example, writing, as a classical concept, carries with it predicates which have been subordinated, excluded, or held in reserve by forces and according to necessities to be analyzed. It is these predicates (I have mentioned some) whose force of generality, generalization, and generativity find themselves liberated, grafted onto a "new" concept of writing which also corresponds to whatever always has *resisted* the former organization of forces, which always has constituted the *remainder* irreducible to the dominant force which organized the—to say it quickly—logocentric hierarchy. To leave to this new concept the old name of writing is to maintain the structure of the graft, the transition and indispensable adherence to an effective *intervention* in the constituted historic field. And it is also to give their chance and their force, their power of *communication*, to everything played out in the operations of deconstruction. (329-330)

It is in this context, therefore that the position of writing *as* difference, and consequently the deconstructive role of *grammatology*, or the study of writing, has to be read. Writing itself is an act of difference, and, conversely, difference lies in nothing but the act of writing itself.

This is so because, as Derrida points out in a 1968 lecture, titled "Différance", that difference is not a positive category, which can be used for this or that purpose. On the contrary, it is a radical absence and its subversive potential lies precisely in this, in it not being a thing at all rather than being an other thing. Derrida says,

[...] *différance* is not. It is not a present being, however unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom. Which makes it obviously threatening and infallibly dreaded by everything in us that desires a kingdom, the past or future presence of a kingdom. (22)

He furthermore goes on to show in the same lecture, that 'differance' exists only in writing, because it is a 'neographism', where its difference with 'difference' spelt with an 'e' can be made out only in writing, when one sees it spelt with an 'a'. The difference cannot be made out either in its phonic form, because it sounds the same in French as 'difference' spelt with an 'e', nor in its logic form, because it means also the same as the French word 'difference' spelt with an 'e', which carries both the senses of differing and deferring within it. As Derrida says in the same lecture about this neographism 'differance',

[T]his discreet graphic intervention [using *a* instead of *e* in spelling 'difference']... came to be formulated in the course of a written investigation of a question about writing. Now it happens, I would say in effect, that this graphic difference (*a* instead of *e*), this marked difference between two apparently vocal notations, between two vowels, remains purely graphic; it is read or is written, but it cannot be heard. It cannot be apprehended in speech, and we will see why it also bypasses the order of apprehension in general. (3-4)

This presentation of differance as absence and as presentable only in the play of writing and not in the sensible or intelligible bases of phonocentric/logocentric language, may make one believe that Derrida's politics is typically nihilistic, ahistorical and thus of no use to real political practice. This is, however, not so, and, as Derrida points out in the 1989 interview, "This Strange Institution Called Literature", his enterprise is "very historicist":

Contrary to what some people believe or have an interest in making believe, I consider myself very much a historian, very historicist [...]. We must constantly recall this historical solidarity and the way in which it is put together. Deconstruction calls for a highly "historian's" attitude (*Of Grammatology*, for example, is a history book through and through), even if we should also be suspicious of the metaphysical concept of history. [...] So this

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“historical solidarity” of literature and the history or tradition of metaphysics must be constantly recalled, even if the differences, the distances must be pointed out, as we were just doing. (54)

Derrida further qualifies this ‘historical’ nature of his deconstructive politics in a 1966 lecture titled “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences”, where far from making difference a nihilistic act of ever-postponement, he looks forward, half in awe and half in the optimism for the arrival of something new, to the birth of the political—a probable unnameable ‘monstrosity’, whose possibility, Derrida is not averse to wait in deference for:

Here there is a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation, and labor* we are only catching a glimpse of today. I employ these words, I admit, with a glance toward the operations of childbearing—but also with a glance toward those who, in a society from which I do not exclude myself, turn their eyes away when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity. (293)

Derrida’s ‘historicist’ deconstruction and the subversive politics lying therein, which furthermore gets operated upon through a foregrounding of writing itself as difference, is primarily oriented in exposing the metaphysical bases of western human sciences in general and philosophy in particular, and I wish to conclude this article by commenting on this subversive political outcome of conceiving writing as difference.

To do this, one can look at a 1971 article called “White Mythology”, where Derrida deconstructs Western metaphysics by describing it, as the title suggests, as a construct that erases its own constructivity by covering the heterogeneous palimpsest that it is, with the invisibility of writing in ‘white ink’. Derrida says,

Metaphysics—the white mythology which reassembles and reflects the culture of the West: the white man takes his own mythology, Indo-European mythology, his own *logos*, that is, the *mythos* of his idiom, for the universal form of that he must still wish to call Reason. [...] White mythology?—metaphysics has erased within itself the fabulous scene that has produced it, the scene that nevertheless remains active and stirring, inscribed in white ink, an invisible design covered over in the palimpsest. (213)

Thus, Western metaphysics becomes primarily metaphorical, its prime exercise being not to state what it is but to cover up what it is not, and Derrida shows how this metaphoricity derives itself not just from signification but also from 'value'—an intersection of the linguistic and the economic. To explain this, Derrida takes recourse to an economic metaphor to demonstrate how the 'exergue' or the obverse of the coin performs this differential task of the metaphor. The value of a metaphor is given by the exergue, but since Western metaphysics is written in the white ink of concealment, its exergue is effaced, and as a result it is impossible to decode the metaphorics that underlies Western philosophy. For Derrida, thus the possibility of decoding all metaphors is not there because the metaphor that gives metaphors their metaphoricity will always remain an elusive differed and deferred centre, and as he says in the same article,

The exergue effaced, how are we to decipher figures of speech, and singularly metaphor, in the philosophic text? [...] Here, instead of venturing into the prolegomena to some future metaphorics, let us rather attempt to recognize in principle the *condition for the impossibility* of such a project. [...] If one wished to conceive and class all the metaphorical possibilities of philosophy, one metaphor, at least, always would remain excluded, outside the system: the metaphor, at the very least, without which the concept of metaphor could not be constructed, or, to syncopate an entire chain of reasoning, the metaphor of metaphor. This extra metaphor, remaining outside the field that it allows to be circumscribed, extracts or abstracts itself from this field, thus subtracting itself as a metaphor less. (219-220)

Therefore, for Derrida, treating the basic unit of philosophy, a 'philosopheme', as a metaphor, in terms of it being written in white ink, does not let it be reduced to the meta-metaphorics of a foundation. This subjection of metaphysics to metaphors, instead, carries the possibility of the immanent dissolution of presence 'in its own radiance', the construction of its own destruction. As Derrida says in "White Mythology",

Presence disappearing in its own radiance, the hidden source of light, of truth, and of meaning, the erasure of the visage of Being—such must be the insistent return of that which subjects metaphysics to metaphor.

To metaphors. The word is written only in the plural. If there were only one possible metaphor, the dream at the heart of philosophy, if one could reduce their play to the circle of a family

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or a group of metaphors, that is, to one “central”, “fundamental”, “principal” metaphor, there would be no more true metaphor, but only, through the one true metaphor, the assured legibility of the proper. Now, it is because the metaphoric is plural from the outset that it does not escape syntax; and that it gives rise, in philosophy too, to a *text* which is not exhausted in the history of its meaning (signified concept or metaphoric tenor: *thesis*), in the visible or invisible presence of its theme (meaning and truth of Being). But it is also because the metaphoric does not reduce syntax, and on the contrary organizes its divisions within syntax, that it gets carried away with itself, cannot be what it is except in erasing itself, indefinitely constructing its destruction. (268)

Derrida shows that there are two possible courses of this metaphoric self-destruction. The first, which is more of a destabilization aimed at better recovery of foundational truths, is tolerated and even encouraged by metaphysics, because rather than causing ‘irreparable damage’, it restores philosophy all the more to its ‘proper meaning’. The other kind of metaphoric self-destruction, however, instead of extending the ‘philosopheme’, limitlessly deconstructs the very opposition between the untrue and the true, the metaphoric and the proper, the constructed and the metaphysical. This is how for Derrida, metaphoricity, which is the strategy that Western philosophy adopts to write itself in concealment, can itself deconstruct the metaphysical bases of Western philosophy, and thus what gets foregrounded once again is the immanent subversive politics of writing as differance.

What has to be foregrounded in Derridean critical practice, therefore, is the differing and deferring differance over current fixities, the play of writing over the centralizing certitude of sounds and ideas, and what he calls a ‘hauntology’ of the spectral over the ‘ontology’ of presences. Derrida shows in a 1993 lecture, published as *Specters as Marx*, how scholars never take the spectral possibility of the literary, the figural and the fictive very seriously:

There has never been a scholar who really, and as scholar, deals with ghosts. A traditional scholar does not believe in ghosts—nor in all that could be called the virtual space of spectrality. There has never been a scholar who, as such, does not believe in the sharp distinction between the real and the unreal, the actual and the inactual, the living and the non-living, being and non-being (‘to be or not to be,’ in the conventional reading), in the opposition between what is present and what is not [...] (11)

For Derrida, however, all forms of knowledge are constructed and speculative

in nature, and, in claiming proximity to truth, they cover it up through different ruses, and set in themselves the discipline of certainties and foundations. A deconstruction of the same, which involves showing the *differant* nature of meaning, is possible through an appropriation of the space of writing, while immanently belonging to it, and a projection through it of the monstrous spectre that awaits an exposure of the fissures and chinks of the inscribed white armour.

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# **A Postmodern Subalternity: Towards a Critique of Foundational Historiography**

*Sumit Chakrabarti*

One of the most prominent functions of postmodernism down the years has been a consistent and agenda-based critique of foundational historiography. An overwhelming reason for this was a failure of agential thrust, on the part of foundational modes of theorising protest, and a consequent inability to move out of the narratives of power. This is applicable for most of the schools of historical thought that have been current in the greater part of the last century as modes of resisting colonial metaphors of appropriation. This is true for nationalism, for discipline studies—such as the various area-studies programmes that became current in the nineteen sixties, and also for Marxism—before it was problematized by Foucault or Althusser or some of their contemporaries. My paper seeks to explore this problem of foundational historiography, about how the critiques of colonialism by both nationalism and Marxism can really be qualified by a self-reflexivity unnoticed by their practitioners. Both of them create patterns of protest that can be subsumed by the self-same colonial logic of homogeneity that they supposedly want to subvert or critique. At the end of my paper I try to evolve a post-foundational way out of this kind of appropriation through the practise of subalternity.

## **The Modernity of Nationalism**

In one of his essays the historian Gyan Prakash argues how counter-theorizations of nationalism, or Marxism, or anthropology/area studies could not move out of certain vices that are so symptomatic of foundational historiography (Prakash 163-90). As a result all of these methods of protest could be easily essentialized and hence subsumed by Western hegemony. Prakash argues how Indian nationalist historiography—something that supposedly countered Orientalism's pervasive generalizations—basically succumbed to an identical logic. There is a lot of sense in this argument, as what the nationalist historians basically did was to transform India as an object of knowledge—from passive to active. Otherwise the basic layout of the study of history remained the same. As Prakash writes:

Nationalist historiographers accepted the patterns set for them by British scholarship. They accepted the periodization of Indian history into the Hindu, Muslim and British periods, later addressed as the ancient, medieval and modern eras; relegated caste to sections on 'Society', that is, with the history of society\* with

politics left out; and reiterated the long and unchanging existence of Sanskritic Indic civilization (Prakash 168).

That is to say, the only agenda of nationalist historiography was to prove that everything good in India, like spirituality, art or political ideas, had indigenous origins. Otherwise, they had no problems with the framework of the study of history as a discipline. What resulted was the lack of problematization in nationalist historiography. The nationalist historians also saw India as an undivided subject capable of sovereignty and autonomy. The promulgation of this logic of a unitary self and identical will of the Indian nation was also a gross essentialism that this new history could not override. They questioned the authority of Orientalist essentialism using the same paradigms of essentialist assumptions without the least regard for individual subject-position of the Indian citizen. This post-Orientalist nationalist historiography thus subscribed to the same binary categorizations of 'us' and 'them', and these historians wrote longish essays about the drain of wealth from India to Britain, the British industrial policies in India that led to the drying up of Indian industries, and the impoverishment of the Indian economy (Chandra, Dutt). This was how India was being transformed from a passive to an active subject of history—according to the nationalist historians—through a complete rejection of the Orientalist canon. This, they thought, was how the Third World was writing its own history, and a renewed sense of empowerment accompanied the writing of these nationalist histories. This is where, however, in their 'reasoned' revival of ancient Indian history, in their frantic efforts to argue an ontological presence of India independent of Western representations, that the nationalist historians were falling back to the post-Enlightenment regime of Reason that is ideologically Orientalist (Chatterjee). Little surprise this, as most of the Indian nationalist historians were Western educated elites riding on the wave of modernity.

Homi Bhabha's critique of modernity goes well with this as he argues how nationalist discourses have persistently tried to produce the idea of the nation as a continuous narrative of national progress. He finds within such history the same grim language of power that it tends to criticize in Orientalist historiography. The consistent use of Orientalist assumptions tries Bhabha as he realizes the implicit ambivalence that is so symptomatic of the emergence of any nation:

It is ambivalence that emerges from a growing awareness that, despite the certainty with which historians speak of the 'origins' of nation as a sign of the 'modernity' of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality (Introduction 1).

Bhabha insists that it is more important to emphasize 'social life' than 'social polity' to realize the inherent ambivalence within a nation. He agrees with Hannah Arendt's view that the modern nation is a hybrid realm where the private and the public easily flow into each other, making the definition, or the idea of a 'nation' contingent.<sup>1</sup> He insists on the transitional nature of history and its conceptual indeterminacy, and resists tendencies to read the idea of the 'nation' restrictively—either 'as the ideological apparatus of state power, somewhat redefined by a hasty, functionalist reading of Foucault or Bakhtin; or, in a more utopian inversion, as the incipient or emergent expression of the "national-popular" sentiment preserved in a radical memory' (Ibid 3). This is the reason why he frequently refers to Tom Nairn's description of the nation as 'the modern Janus' where there is both progression and regression, political rationality and irrationality—that is to say a natural ambivalence (Ibid 2).<sup>2</sup> The post-modernist in Bhabha resists any attempt at a 'closure' within the idea of a nation as he sees the nation-space as perpetually evolving, *in medias res*, at the moment of enunciation. As he clearly expresses in his introduction to *Nation and Narration*, his chief intention as the editor of this anthology has been to reveal the ambivalent margin of the nation-space:

To reveal such a margin is, in the first instance, to contest claims to cultural supremacy, whether these are made from the 'old' post-imperialist metropolitan nations, or on the behalf of the 'new', independent nations of the periphery (Introduction 4).

In this contention Bhabha has moved a step beyond his theorization of mimicry. In mimicry there were still implicit connotations of the sense of nationalism from the perspective of the native subject. But here Bhabha is not talking of a celebratory self-marginalization. This is a more substantial intervention into the very justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism—that rationalize the authoritarian tendencies within cultures in the name of national interest. The ambivalent, ever-evolving notion of the nation will blur boundaries and allow an interplay of meanings, whereby cultural identities will become resistant to hegemonic formations. The resultant cultural contamination will initiate a process of cultural production outside the strategies of colonial modernity.

### Marxism as Foundational

The Marxists argue how nationalism was structurally incapable of performing the tasks of modernization of colonized Third-World societies. The reason for this was the fact that nationalism promoted the notion of an undivided India—unitary in its conception and opposition—to an identically undivided notion of Europe. Even the division performed in terms of the caste-system was

viewed in terms of a unitary structure that rendered a smooth functioning of the societal and communitarian functions. It was not meant as a divisive mechanism that cut the society into many heterogeneous parts. This superstructural development is dismissed summarily by the Marxists as ideological. They also insist on the basically divisive nature of the caste-system, and the kind of political unrest it is capable of creating. In fact they consider this sense of unity promulgated by the casteists as false consciousness. As Sumit Sarkar, the Marxist historian notes:

Historiographical elision has been most powerful of all in respect of caste, and yet it is precisely this dimension that has shot into unexpected prominence in recent years, with the lower caste rally around the Mandal proposals and the Ayodhya Mandir campaign confronting each other, and BJP leader Advani's Rath-yatra of autumn 1990 having an obvious relationship with high-caste hysteria over reservations (Sarkar 359).

The Marxists, rather, tried to write the history of the Third World in terms of the modes of production narrative and from the perspective of political economy. This is the reason why they emphasized the writing of class histories—so that a heterogeneous perspective might be acquired to explode both the Orientalist and the nationalist myths of an undivided India. Obviously, this class based writing of history was more modern than the caste based version. By its refusal to ascribe any fundamental significance to caste, the Marxist argument was able to uphold, without qualification, the legal-political principles of the modern state, and to boldly advocate the cultural project of modernity. They insisted that the writing of non-class histories would suppress the history of the oppressed, and accused nationalist historiography of elitist essentialism. The Marxist historians rather wrote histories of movements and rebellions and tried to link these histories with the modes of production narrative (Desai, Joshi). In these histories they tried to rupture the myth of the unitary nation by revealing class conflicts, heterogeneity and resistance that were always an intrinsic part of Indian history.

Albeit these valid claims of superiority of Marxist historiography over the nationalist and the casteist, there still remains the problem of representation and representability. In their looking into the histories of oppression and rebellion Marxist historians have indeed laid out a thematic pattern of class struggle and structural conflict that is heterogeneous in nature. Even then, however specific their composition of class, the subject-position of the individual is inevitably compromised. A class or a structure is ultimately resistant to further heterogeneity, and here Marxist historiography succumbs to the claims of foundationalism. My intention here is not to dismiss Marxist

historiography by calling it essentialist. What I am trying to suggest is that a class-based or structure-based historiography cannot ultimately represent the claims of a contingent, ever-vacillating subject-position. The theoretical structure of Marxism cannot sustain such locational arbitrariness and this is where it has to give way to post-foundational strategies of reading. The individual subject has to assume arbitrary and contingent roles that slip away from all attempts at fixing them to reference frames. Neither nationalism, nor area-studies, nor Marxism can represent their unrepresentability, and hence the obvious movement toward postmodernism.

### **Post-Foundational Historiography: A Possible Way Out**

In the above discussion I have tried to establish how neither nationalism, nor Marxism or area studies could successfully historicize the growth and/or development of a truly modern, colonial-capitalist Third World, as they could not ultimately displace the paradigmatic frameworks within which colonialism or Orientalism worked. The need therefore was to move out of all these reference frames and rethink the approach to historiography, so that a sovereign, independent representation of the Third World could be made possible. Such a scheme could only come through if this entire politics of identitarianism could be unsettled. This was one of the chief thrusts of the Subaltern Studies group of historians, whose aim was to recover the history of the marginal groups. These historians, mostly trained in the First World, advocated the 'history-from-below' approach that unsettled the nationalist historiography on the one hand by exploding the myth of a unified India; and the Marxist account of history on the other, which see these histories from below as the preludes to the emergence of a full-fledged class consciousness. The Subaltern Group of historians replace the Marxist idea of class by their concept of subalternity. This subalternity is manifested through a variety of means—social, cultural, linguistic, and economic. Thus, the monolithic idea of history as caste or history as class is deconstructed, and history is narrativized as the unfolding of power relations in terms of society, or culture, or language, or economic considerations. The project of subalternity, therefore, tries to see the discipline of history writing not as homogeneous, but as differential and contestatory, where each subject position is defined on its own terms.<sup>3</sup> Thus the margin (or even beyond) is rescued from the hegemonic essentializations of both the colonialist and the nationalist bourgeois. As Gyan Prakash writes:

...the significance of their project lies in the writing of histories freed from the will of the colonial and national elites. It is this project of resisting the colonial and nationalist discursive

hegemonies, through histories of the subaltern whose identity resides in difference, which makes the work of these scholars a significant intervention in third-world historiography (Prakash 180-81).

Thus, this kind of history writing removes identity out of the trope of the essential into that of the relational. The construction of contingent and unstable identities releases the writing of history from all the formations of modernity, and initiates a movement towards an insurgent postmodernity. This is, by no means, a final solution to the problems of Indian (or Third World) historiography, but this is indeed a valid way of unsettling the essentialist mores of foundational historiography.

### Strategies of Survival: The Moment of Politics

The founding of identity in the relational rather than the essential is an attempt to move beyond the obvious closures of foundational historiography, and this is what subaltern historiography can ideally attempt to do. The kind of differential identity that Gyan Prakash talks about can be theoretically sustained through the strategy of the enunciative moment, so wonderfully explicated by Homi Bhabha. Bhabha sees the political less as a bi-polar construct, and more as an ambivalent space for negotiating representation. And he finds the theoretical as deeply embedded in the political, the latter being a site for imaginary representations of both activism and theory.<sup>4</sup> He thus sees the political as a hybrid, multipolar space that qualifies meaning, helps it emerge in its diversity/multiplicity thereby making 'truth' contingent and relative. Let me analyze the very syllogistic manner by which Bhabha establishes this point. He writes:

...the theoretical enterprise has to represent the adversarial authority (of power and/or knowledge) which, in a doubly inscribed move, it simultaneously seeks to subvert and replace (*Commitment to Theory* 33).

He is talking about the function of theory. The representation of the adversarial authority is thus not fixed, but 'doubly inscribed', not searching for a unilateral truth, but ambivalent and slippery:

The 'true' is always marked and informed by the ambivalence of the process itself, the productivity of meanings that construct counter-knowledges *in medias res*... (Ibid).

Political positions are thus always and inevitably emerging, ambivalent and in a state of flux. The political 'imagination' that Bhabha conceives of is set into motion in 'the unreal neutral space of the Third Person' (Ibid 35), not

as a priori pre-constituted principle but as a dialogical and discursive exchange.<sup>5</sup>

Through this dialogical and discursive exchange Bhabha seeks to dislocate the demands of enlightenment rationality by creating an enunciative temporality that is ever-evolving, always in a state of flux. This moment of enunciation is the moment of politics, of hovering around the fringes of political commitment—that refuses all definitions, and hence essentializations. The subject-position of the subaltern subject is created and destroyed at the selfsame moment of signification whereby representation becomes a game where nobody wins (and, therefore, the subaltern does not loose). As Bhabha writes:

This emphasis on the disjunctive present of utterance enables the historian to get away from defining subaltern consciousness as binary, as having positive and negative dimensions. It allows the articulation of subaltern agency to emerge as relocation and reinscription (*The Postcolonial and the Postmodern* 277).

This kind of an interventionist strategy of the ‘moment of politics’ can, I presume, suitably deconstruct the grand narratives of foundational historiography in the forms of colonialism, or nationalism, or Marxism, and locate the subaltern within an ambiguous Third Space of unrepresentability.

The celebration of the postmodern ‘fragment’ that I have intended in the above lines for the representation (or non-representation) of the subaltern subject comes primarily out of a sense of responsibility for a very complex and emergent idea of the ‘nation’ that I see in the India around me today. Generalizations and assimilations are there to stay, be it in the form of mass euphoria about the Indian cricket team, or choosing a government through a process of general elections in one of the largest democracies in the world. While interacting with a cross-section of the population a few days ago about the future of Indian democracy, I was struck by a very interesting comment from a doctor. Generalizations are inevitable, he argued, as both the honourable judge and his orderly have but one vote each. True, and that is the reason why both the judge and his orderly need to understand their situation of compromise within the framework of foundational assumptions, and thereby resist assimilation. I must also add that I do not use the term ‘subaltern’ in the strictly Gramscian sense of their class identity as the deprived, or the proletarian (Hoare and Smith 52). I further particularize it to mean any individual whose subject-position is under duress in a given social situation (an immediate example that comes to mind is of a female socialite who finds herself in a room full of academics), and how he/she can successfully problematize the moment of enunciation, and resist assimilation/rejection.

Historians such as Professor Irfan Habib, or Professor K.N. Pannikar have

consistently expressed their doubts about these attempts at the fragmentary writing of history, and argued how such micro-histories are, in truth, neo-colonial, bourgeois attempts at trivializing the project of Indian historiography (Habib: 1994, Pannikar). While it is true that the writing of these micro-histories have sometimes used esoteric postmodern theoretical tools, but that does not preclude their claims towards unsettling the hegemonic paradigms of foundational history writing through consistent and valid patterns of argumentation. The fear of historians such as Habib and Pannikar about the loss of totalizations is, I think, unfounded. They believe that in this rush for the particular, the individual, the 'micro', the discipline of Indian historiography as a critique of colonialism and a consolidation of the Indian nation will be compromised. The point that they perhaps miss is that generalizations are an inevitable part of such a large democracy as India—be it in terms of governmentality, or administration, or entertainment, or most importantly, the writing of history. The 'moment' of subalternity cannot, hard as it may try, subvert this pattern of historical development in a matter of days. Gyanendra Pandey has perhaps analysed the function of the fragment most pithily:

The fragment is...an appeal to an alternative perspective. It is a call to try and analyse the historical construction of the totalities we work with, the contradictions that survive within them, the possibilities they appear to fulfil, the dreams and possibilities apparently suppressed: in a word, the fragility and instability of the 'givens' (the 'meaningful totalities') of history (Pandey 296).

The postmodernity within histories of the subaltern, therefore, has an interventionist function that would unsettle the triumphalism of modernist rationality. It will remind us of the contingency and arbitrariness of any subject-position, forcing us to admit the 'presence' of the individual within casteist or classist historiographies. The project of subalternity in its postmodern avatar might never be successful in its attempts at total fragmentation of the discipline of history, but what it might successfully do is problematize the writing of all histories (including that of the subaltern) in the years to come.

### **Notes and References**

1. For Hannah Arendt's idea of the nation see *The Human Condition* (1958).
2. Tom Nairn problematizes the idea of the nation by comparing it to Janus. He notices an ambivalence in the evolution of the space of the nation. See Tom Nairn, *The Break-up of Britain* (1981) for more on this.
3. For a discussion on this see Ranajit Guha, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" (1-7). Sumit Sarkar, the Marxist historian, was

certainly quite critical of Guha's arguments, and finds in them a source of 'rich paradox'. See Sarkar, 'The Decline of the Subaltern' (92-3).

4. For a discussion on the presence of the imaginary in the political see, Stuart Hall, 'Blue election, election blues' in *Marxism Today* (30-5).
5. For Bhabha's idea about political judgement being the problem of finding a form of public rhetoric able to represent different and opposing political contents, he is indebted to J.S. Mill (Mill 93-4)

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## **Speaking a Language that is not my own Signifying Difference**

*Anjali Gera*

The characters in Meera Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* switch with consummate ease between Indian English, Hindi and Punjabi. The film's codeswitching could be alternately seen as an authentic reproduction of contemporary urban Indian speech or Nair's commitment to the Government of India's three tier language formula. But Nair does more than add local flavour or fulfill the authenticity requirement by retaining Hindi and Punjabi speech. Her refusal to translate Hindi/Punjabi colloquial speech problematizes cultural incommensurability. Cultural difference is enunciated at the precise moment of Hindi or Punjabi language slippage as Nair's non-Hindi, non-Punjabi viewer grapples with the verbal content. Codeswitching becomes the key to the translation of post-colonial difference in a language that is not one's own. Nair's strategy is to use the gap between the colonial language and the colonized world to enunciate cultural difference. The gap between the colonial sign and the colonized world alters the sign's significatory function as it signifies meaning as absence.

The failure of the colonial sign to embody post-colonial presence maybe grasped as *difference* in both its meanings, *to differ* and *to defer* (Bass Derrida: 1982). Meaning is produced through the perception of difference or contrast between signifying elements arranged in a sequence. The concept of the trace has been proposed to explain how the inhabitation of the trace of forms one is not uttering in a sign is meaning producing. The difference between contrasting elements that enables signs to signify under normal conditions is supplemented here by another signifying difference through the inhabitation of the sign by the trace of the absent referent. The difference of the colonial sign from the signified leads meaning to be eternally deferred. Post-colonial difference eluding the colonial sign becomes symptomatic of the elusive search for meaning in the absence of a signified. The signification of post-colonial difference through a colonial sign calls attention to the gap between sign and meaning. As the mental image of the signified recalled by the use of the signifier has no equivalent in the post-colonial world, the signifier refers to an absent signified. The repetition of the colonial sign by the colonized calls forth the absence rather than the presence of the signified. The sign, by signifying the thing not present, can only have a 'deferred presence'. In the post-colonial situation, when the sign is used to denote the thing that can never be present may be comprehended as difference.

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This is perhaps ‘the movement of meaning’ that Bhabha mentions while outlining his now familiar notion of cultural difference. “Transfer of meaning”, Bhabha declares, “can never be total between differential systems of meaning, or within them”(1990: 314). He borrows Walter Benjamin’s ‘foreignness of languages’ idea to elucidate his own ideas. Bhabha’s reinterpretation of Benjamin’s metaphor explains the gap not as unsuitability but as ‘alienation’. Bhabha defines alienation as depriving content of “an immediate access to a stable or holistic reference ‘outside’ itself - in society”(1990: 314). The ‘reinscription’ and ‘reconstitution’ of social condition in the very act of enunciation that Bhabha sees as collapsing the inside and outside ‘overpowers’ content. Translating post-colonial worlds into foreign languages signifies the absence of the signified. As the signifier erases the post-colonial referent by overwriting it with an ‘absent’ signified, it stops short of signifying any signified in the real world. The ‘signifying structure of linguistic difference’, instead, calls attention to the alienness of the signified.

Difference, is defined as the movement according to which language, or any code, any system of referral in general is constituted ‘historically’ as ‘a weave of differences’. Difference is the source of meaning production in any code whose users understand the rules of differentiation. The perception of the rules and convention of the semiotic system wills the signified into being. Given the historical specificity of the rules and conventions governing semiotic systems, they are inevitably weighted in favour of the translating languages. To be forced to articulate the self in a language that is not one’s own immediately puts one at a disadvantage. One always sounds a little ridiculous explaining one’s self in another’s language because one must submit to an alien system of rules.

Traditional theories of meaning production fail to explain post-colonial signification in alien languages. The referential theory of meaning posits that words have referents in the real world whereas the deterministic theory proposes that language constructs the world. Whether they see the sign as reflecting or constructing worlds, the sign is not absolved of its referential responsibility. Similarly, whether the signifier signified relations are those of identity or non-identity, the sign referent link is preserved. This persists even in the Saussurean model that shows the two to be connected arbitrarily. Saussure retains the signifier signified binary even though his insight into meaning production as differential and relational significantly alters signifier signified relations. It is the Derridean discovery of meaning as the product of a play of signifiers sans referents that marks a leap in the perception of the sign. The dismantling of the metaphysics of presence, signaling the absence of the transcendental signified, opens the way for an understanding of post-

colonial signification in colonial languages. For the colonial sign has always signified absence in postcolonial societies. The colonial language invariably configures the post-colonial referent as an absence.

The post-colonial use of the colonial language throws all theories of meaning into doubt. At the simplest level, signs are bound in a referential relation with meaning. This view of meaning rests on a Cartesian division between subject and object underlying empirical philosophies. The signifier signified binary is premised on the reality of the objective world of the signified to which signifiers might be unambiguously matched. Though the plurality of sign systems rules out a universal signification system, the world of things they denote is assumed to be universal. Though signs might differ, they are believed to denote a single world. The post-colonial use of the colonial sign refutes a simple referentiality because signs can never have 'a full referential presence' in the post-colonial situation. But one must remember that the sign is never referential in the pure sense. The sign has multiple referents varying accord to the context and use. The matching of sign and referent is not preordained but governed by their 'situated-ness'. This makes those who experience referents directly appear no more privileged than those who experience them indirectly. The link between sign and referent is not pre-given but established by usage to which both groups of users might have equal access. When a floating signifier is transposed to a different setting sans its referent, it can be applied to new referents signifying a different meaning in its use in the post-colonial situation. Take a simple word like *party*, loosely used to translate a variety of Indian celebrations, signifying a social gathering of a different composition from its Western counterpart. Indian users of the term would normally understand it to denote a social event with food and conversation prime on the agenda rather than drinks or dancing.

A culture's contact with others first apprises it of the possibility of other worlds in addition to other words. Words, in fact, are found to be inseparable from worlds. The collapse of the two world theory (world of words and world of things) by the one world theory (the word is the world) goes a long way in reducing the signifier signified duality. But the dissolution of the signifier signified dichotomy sets off a new signification hegemony. A change in signification systems is viewed as invariably ushering a cultural imposition, particularly when the translation is between cultures in asymmetrical relations of power.

All these theories posit meaning as presence, as being present somewhere despite Saussure's warning about there being 'only difference, without *positive terms*'. For example, the intentional theory of meaning, of meaning as a mental image in the mind of the sender that the receiver must decipher has been

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challenged. In this view of meaning production, successful transmission of meaning occurs when the mental image of meaning is accurately transferred to the mind of the listener. But meaning is never an objective or neutral content in the simplest of transactions. Meaning is a dialogic process produced at the convergence of various *interpretants*. The insertion of the *interpretant* between the signifier and the signified has changed meaning from a unified essence to a constructed entity. The interpersonal gap concept is developed along the intentional fallacy. The interpersonal gap presupposes a discrepancy between what the speaker intended to say and what she actually said. The listener's task becomes that of getting behind the actual statement/action to the intended meaning. The production of meaning really occurs in the process of transmission as the speaker and the listener put it to a specific use in a particular context. This, too, reduces the gap between the native users of the language gifted with particular mental images denied to post-colonial users. The intentional theory explains gaps in understanding as a difference in the filters of the interlocutors. The difference in the interpretation of the same signifier by different parties may be traced to difference in their individual or social filters. The greater the parity between the filters of individuals caught in an exchange of sign systems, the greater the possibility of constructing a shared meaning. As two individuals' experience can never be identical, every party in a speech situation attributes a different meaning to the signifier. The divergence in the meaning of the signifier in post-colonial cultures occurs because of the greater difference in the filters of the two users of the sign system. The psychological distance between interlocutors in any situation is doubly accentuated between the speaker and the listener in the post-colonial situation.

Challenging the notion of meaning as a pre-given to be transmitted across different parties in a dialogue, Bill Ashcroft calls for a constitutive theory of meaning. Ashcroft offers a different explanation of the absence of meaning as an objective content from that in post-structuralist theory. Instead of presenting it as an empty play of signifiers, he highlights meaning as a social situation in which language signs play with meaning. He introduces constitutive semiology to explain the inversion of the *langue* *parole* balance in post-colonial settings. He believes that here the *parole* is reinstalled over the *langue*. Meaning is determined by actual usage of members rather than through a theoretically abstract code or *a priori* referentiality. This necessitates a major modification of Saussurean theory about signs meaning by their difference from other signs and the arbitrary link between the signifier and the signified. According to Ashcroft, meaning is determined within the relations actualized in the rather than purely abstractual systems. Privileging language use, *parole*, over a prior



conditioning by particular languages, Ashcroft disagrees with the Sapir Whorf hypothesis. He maintains that to borrow a language is not necessarily to borrow a world. One may put the borrowed language to a shared use without inheriting the entire worldview. He argues that if speakers of the same language can construct meaning despite the difference in their filters, there is a possibility of exchange of meaning in this context inspite of cultural incommensurability. Ashcroft avers that 'meaning is a social accomplishment characterized by the participation of the writer and reader 'functions' within the 'events' of the particular discourse.(2001: 60) This makes the discursive event, the site of communication, central in post-colonial literatures and makes meaning a 'situated accomplishment'.

Ashcroft's constitutive theory exploits the Derridean model of writing as absence for post-colonial purposes. He finds a similarity between the production of meaning between the absentee users with that among post-colonial players. The essential distance between the reader and writer is accentuated in the post-colonial situation. The 'emancipation of meaning' that Derrida sees as occurring in writing is transferred to the post-colonial appropriation of English. But this is where Ashcroft parts company with Derrida. Though writing is seen as a new ontological event, it never cuts itself off from the voice in Derrida. Ashcroft differentiates this from post-colonial writing, which *represents* neither speech nor local reality but constructs a discourse, which may imitate them.

The film *Lagaan* offers a classic example of the use of the colonial sign for post-colonial purposes while speaking from the locus of the other. The match is unequal because the rules and convention that determine winning and losing remain incomprehensible to the native team till the very end. Though they rectify the initial mistake of looking at the match as a simple game of skill, they do not fully grasp the finer points governing the rules of playing cricket. When Bhuvan and his team mimic the English players, they reproduce actions that differ in 'the repetition that will not return as the same'. Bhuvan and his team play the game in a post-colonial mimicry that 'produces other spaces of subaltern signification'(Bhabha: 312).

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# **“It overflows all maps”: Nation and Frontier in Patrick White’s *Voss***

***Deb Narayan Bandyopadhyay***

## **I**

Eric Hobsbawm has analysed cultures being configured as a metaphoric representation of nations; and in certain cases, nationalism seeks to invent a cultural tradition even at the cost of effacing the pre-existing cultures<sup>1</sup>. The lexeme ‘nation’ can therefore be configured as a qualifying term aimed at achieving a distinctive cultural signification. Australian nationalist agenda is largely pre-occupied with this specific anxiety of inventing a cultural myth that would explain the intrinsic parameters of identity formation.

Patrick White is a major Australian writer who has again and again tried to interpret the nation’s exploration history in terms of its gradually evolving forms of spatiality and frontier. Acclaimed as a “born writer” and again criticized on grounds of contrived stylistic patterns by A.D. Hope (Marr 307-310), White has still remained a controversial novelist.

There is a large body of critical writing on Patrick White’s fictions. David J Tracey has tried to emphasize the Jungian influences on White’s novels and interrelated them to the growth of the Australian unconscious.<sup>2</sup> Tracey’s critical reading seems to be a development on an earlier and similar reading made by Peter Beatson in 1976.<sup>3</sup> These psychological configurations have in a sense investigated the nature of dualism working in White’s novels. Carolyn John Bliss has therefore examined the interrelation of the visionary and the artist in the novels of White.<sup>4</sup> But Laurence Steven stands against this dichotomous dualism, searching, instead, for an overruling sense of unity which is achieved through White’s search for human values.<sup>5</sup>

Critics have also examined the narrative structure and stylistic features as formative determinants in White’s novels. As early as 1976, William Walsh writing a few years after White was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature made a general survey of the narrative strategies in Patrick White’s *Voss*.<sup>6</sup> In 1980 Brian Kiernan tried to give an overview of White’s choice of themes, characterization and variations of critical attitudes.<sup>7</sup> Again Peter Wolfe published a kind of readers’ guide on White’s novels.<sup>8</sup> In 1993 Gordon Collier made a detailed analysis of discursive patterns of style and narrative designs in White’s fiction.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that these critics have largely tried to prioritize the problems of psyche, dualistic interplay and narrative/technical strategies in White’s fictions.

But it is unfortunate that they should have ignored White's essentialization of space and frontier in his novels. This paper therefore seeks to examine White's *Voss* with reference to the problematic of space and frontier that seems to coalesce with the Australian nationalist formation.

## II

Patrick White's *Voss* is based on the true record of Ludwig Leichhardt's journey though Australia leading to his death in the desert in 1844. This historical record particularly appeals to White in so far as Leichhardt's exploration has been a distinctive part of the story of Australian frontier.

As Voss arrives at Mr Bonner's residence, we come to know that he has been in Australia "for two years and four months" (11). But he has formed an intimate perception of the land. Though the settlers of New South Wales fail to perceive the mysterious obscurity of the land, he discovers an intense complexity in this country. He says to Laura : " Your country is of great subtlety" (11). It should also be remembered that it is not merely an adventurist's wild dreams that has brought him to Australia. He seems to locate an element of infinite mysticity. Voss therefore says to Le Mesurier:

But in this disturbing country, so far as I am acquainted with it already, it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite (35).

He wants to "cross the continent from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it with my heart" (33). He also declares that he will "venture to call it my country. And although so little of my country is known to me yet" (41). Voss' statements are very distinctively compatible with Fred Alexander's concept of the 'moving frontier'. Alexander in his *Moving Frontiers* analyses the frontier influence in "pastoral frontier across the Blue Mountains made possible by the explorations of Baxland and others and by the sheep breeding experiments of John Macarthur" (26) and thinks that this form of expansion has been "spontaneous and individualist" (27). Alexander's analysis of the frontier is essentially geographical and political. But in Voss' journey, White implicates this pattern of the moving frontier at the concrete as well as the abstract levels. The concrete level of topographical exploration is gradually transformed into a form of spiritual experience. After Voss and his party leave for Jildra , they are gradually confronted by different forms of adversity. Jildra is therefore the last terminating point of the normative civilized world. When the explorers are exposed to the ruthlessness of the arid Australian topography, they begin to encounter various forms of emotional responses.

But what is the purpose of this exploration? In one of his conversations

with Voss, Palfreyman considers this as an opportunity to pursue his scientific interests as an ornithologist. But Voss idealises the entire project of exploration: "It is rather the will of God that I should carry out certain chosen undertakings" ( 47 ). Voss comes to be absolutely identified with the country, as he says earlier: " I will venture to call it my country, although I am a foreigner" (40-41). Later Laura Trevelyan identifies him with the entire landscape, with the desert:

I can imagine some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice, and, yes, even hatred. You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places, in which you will find your own situation taken for granted, or more than that, exalted (87-88).

Voss seems to inspire this passion for exploration in all other characters in the novel. Laura particularly romanticizes the element of exoticism associated with an unusual journey. She says :

I liked to think I might visit foreign places, such as the one from which my present had come. I would dream about the Indies, Mauritius, Zanzibar (106).

She knows that the project of exploration involves dangers , yet she is prepared to welcome dangers: " One must not expect to avoid suffering" (107).

The entire course of journey is configured in terms of White's perception of Australian space and frontier. As Voss and his party progress through their journey , they traverse various forms of space, thereby moving along new frontiers of the Australian landscape. It is a journey from the comfortable through the healing to the threatening landscape. They progress from the comfortable society of urban settlement in New South Wales. This is evident in Mr Bonner's impassioned statement:

We have only to consider the progress we have made. Look at our homes and public edifices. Look at the devotion of our administrators, and the solid achievement of those men who are settling the land (29).

Voss' journey gradually takes him to the healing aspects of the landscape. There are two distinctive phases in the next part of their journey: Sanderson and Boyle take care of the group in Rhine Towers and Jildra respectively. In Rhine Towers Voss seems to expect a healing landscape. It is a strange, mysterious world of silence. He begins to feel that "the world of gods was becoming a world of men" (124). But the topography gradually changes as they reach Jildra. It gradually becomes dry and rough:

By now the tall grass was almost dry, so that there issued from it a sharper sighing when the wind blew. The wind bent the grass into tawny waves, on the crests of which floated the last survivors of flowers, and shriveled and were sucked under by the swell (165).

Yet Rhine Towers and Jildra have still been part of the civilized world. It is true that there is a gradual topographical change in the journey from Rhine Towers to Jildra. Yet Voss is still within a civilized territory of settlement.

But the landscape begins to be threateningly mysterious and strange as they progress further. The desert landscape unravels itself with its mystic cruelty:

They had entered, as it happened, a valley sculptured in red rock and quartz, in which a river ran, rather shallow and emotional... Heat appeared to intensify the green of a variety of splendid trees, some sprouting with hair or swords ... (195).

### III

In course of their journey, they negotiate complex problematics of space. But how should we perceive the complex interweaving of spaces ? How should we determine the nature of interspatiality? We should remember that , in terms of confronting new frontiers, Voss also begins to question complex forms of spatiality. In other words, as the frontiers recede or expand, Voss seems to raise intense issues related to spatiality. In this context, it is highly relevant to consider Henri Lefebvre's statement in *The Production of Space*:

The field we are concerned with are, first, the *physical* —nature, the Cosmos; secondly, the *mental*, including logical and formal abstractions; and thirdly, the *social*. In other words, we are concerned with logico-epistemological space, the space of social practice, the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias (11-12)

As Voss enters the desert, the idea of physical space comes to be gradually contentious in so far as it gets involved with mental as well as social spaces. Each of the explorers begin to construct a mental space in terms of his experience. One of the central problematics of their journey into the heart of Australia is the gradual division of the party. As they leave Jildra, the last point of connection with the civilized life, and enter gradually into the Australian wilderness, the arid topography separates them into divergent mental spaces. It is Turner who first initiates the politics of division because he feels threatened that Voss' journey will disrupt the accepted forms of knowledge

and he shares his thoughts with Angus: "People of that kind will destroy what you and I know. It is a form of madness with them" (255).

It seems to be a disastrous journey into the unknown that becomes increasingly menacing for them. Judd, the proposed leader of the rival party, thinks that it is useless to proceed any further. He explains their decision to split off:

It is not cowardice if there is hell before and hell behind, and nothing to choose between them.... I will go home. Even if I come to grief on the way, I am going home (346).

Palfreyman declines to belong to any party, but he begins the painful drama of death which gradually leads to the death of all the explorers. But how should they look at death? Le Mesurier refers to death in a strange, mystical way:

Dying is creation. The body creates fresh forms, the soul inspires by its manner of leaving the body, and passes into other souls (361).

When all others die, Voss begins to wait for death. It becomes a quiet perception of the final moment of life: the inevitable hour for the extinction of the body:

So the explorer waited. He did not fear the tortures of the body, for little enough of that remained. It was some final torment of the spirit that he might not have the strength to endure (391).

It is also possible to locate two distinctive levels of social spaces that collide and contest against each other. This exploration narrative would have been extremely irrelevant and inconsistent, if there had been an absence of the Black and White encounter. The Australian White settler society supporting the exploration seems to be counter-pointed by the Black aboriginal society which looks upon it as an unholy encroachment.

The dark interior of Australia is best illustrated in the cave episode (Chapter 10). When Jackie takes Voss inside the primitive cave, Voss finds it intense and passionless:

The floor was deep in dust, which deadened footfall, and made for reverence. There was a smell of dust and age, also possibly of human bodies, but ancient ones, and passionless at last (274).

The rock drawings, especially those of the Great Snake, the Father of all 'Blackfeller', seems to be a mystical enactment of the strange creative principle. Le Mesurier considers the rock drawing of the Great Snake a symbolic

representation of eternity. The colours may have worn out, "but it could arch itself like a rainbow out of the mud of tribulation". It is almost a mythic portrayal of strangeness:

At one point during his struggles, the sick man, or visionary, kissed the slime of the beast's mouth, and at once spat out a shower of diamonds (281)

#### IV

Patrick White's *Voss* is therefore an attempt to construct a socio-cultural paradigm that substantially explains a distinctive aspect of cultural nationalism. It probably remains embedded in the task of reclaiming and resolving the dilemma of Australian identity. For Patrick White, the cartographic reality is one of the ways to understand the mystic reality inherent in the land and region. This teleologic progress from the cartographic to the mystic reifies the essential nature of Australian nationalism which is appropriately articulated by Laura's statement at the end of the novel:

Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind (446).

#### Notes and References

- 1 See E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* pp.10-12. It is also useful to consult Anthony D. Smith's *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*. See also Birrell, Robert. *A Nation of Our Own. Citizenship and Nation-Building in Federation Australia*. Longman. Melbourne. 1995.
2. See David J. Tracey, *Patrick White. Fiction and the Unconscious* for more.
3. Peter Beatson, *The Eye in the Mandala.— Patrick White: A Vision of Man and God*.
- 4 Caroline John Bliss, *Patrick White's Fiction: The Paradox of Fortunate Failure*.
- 5 Laurence Steven, *Dissociation and Wholeness in Patrick White's Fiction*.
6. William Walsh, "Patrick White: Voss." *Studies in English Literature*, 62.
7. Kiernan, Brian. *Patrick White*. Macmillan: London. 1980.
- 8 Peter Wolfe, *Laden Chours: The Fiction of Patrick White*.
9. Gordon Collier, *The Rocks and Sticks of Words: Style, Discourse and Narrative Structure in the Fiction of Patrick White*. See also R. Shepherd and K. Singh eds. *Patrick White: A Critical Symposium*.

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# **Crossing Frontiers / Engulfing Conversions: Achebe's Igboland, from the Colonial to the Neo-Colonial Space**

*Shreya Bhattacharji*

Colonial cartographical and demographical rewriting of continents executed multiple conversions. Nigerian Igboland doubles as a fascinating conversion graph revealing singular expanding demographical and hierarchical trends. A tentative subaltern religion Christianity initially converted the *efulefus* or the misfits. With active colonial support this ambitious religion soon constructed a power-consumerism intoxicated generation. In our contemporary neo-colonial universe, honey-coated 'globalization' codes for remote controlled first world politico-eco-cultural conversion of the third world.

## **Phase 1: Religio-Cultural Conversions: Myth to Reality**

Myths of reciprocity forever concealed the exploitative nature of cross-cultural relations. A singular myth was the irresistible desire of the native woman for the white European male, encoding the submission of the colonized. The dark 'Indian Queen' converted to Christianity to marry the would-be-colonizer. She voluntarily gave her body, her self and more importantly her fabled wealth to the white man. The 'Pocahontas trope' in nineteenth century white American descriptions of Navajo women was another variation of the reciprocal myth. Pocahontas was young, beautiful, untouched, 'an erotic virgin'. She welcomed the white male trespasser into her own terrain. Fascinated by this demi-god, she contemptuously discarded her own culture as inferior. In reciprocal myths all cross-cultural transactions were mutually beneficial and involved the exercise of free will. In surrendering entire continents for white plunder, the natives always exercised choice. Fantasized religio-cultural conversions served as the ideological justification for rape and rampage.

In the African context, racial western discourse obsessed with color and nakedness, stereotyped the African long before actual enslavement and colonial plunder began. Polygenetic racist discourse had already reduced the African to a different species. The subsequent monogenetic discourse though compelled to include him within the human species, nevertheless treated him as a non-being and placed him at the bottom of the racial ladder. There was however a major ideological problem in the Christian colonial racist discourse. Christianity defined a single origin for all humanity. Ironically, the acceptance of this biblical truth gave the African human status. It became singularly difficult to explain the presence of 'savages' and 'monsters', invariably black. Whether blackness was a product of climate and environment, or a God-

ordained sign of sinfulness was much debated and finally blackness was cunningly associated with sin, evil or Noah's bad son Ham. Yet the black savage refused to be erased.

Christianity held out the possibility of conversion, and once converted, the African could be brought to fold. The acceptance of Christianity by the African negated the colonial myth that the bridge between the East and the West, the African and the European, the 'other' and the 'self' was insurmountable. Conversely the 'Gift of Christianity' was supposed to spiritually recompense the colonized. The scope of conversion to a 'superior' religion ideologically justified colonial carnage, the inhuman consumption of people, resources and territory.

### Phase 2: Religio-Colonial Conversions

White colonialism made its first appearance in tribal Achebe territory in the late nineteenth century in the form of the powerful divisive force, the Christian missionaries. Confident in its own values, the Igbo world did not feel threatened; it misjudged the strength of the missionaries and regarded the placatory strategies of self-effacing men like Mr. Brown who 'trod softly' on the Igbo faith, avoided direct confrontation with the tribe, but burrowed deep into the Igbo matrix, with a certain superior humor. The 'mad logic of the Trinity' appeared amusing (Achebe 1995: 161, 134). Mr. Brown's extreme docility reinforced the clan's false sense of security.

Ambitious Christianity initially functioned as a tentative harbinger, surreptitiously creeping in through the invisible but inherent cracks in the Igbo cultural matrix. The early Christian converts were the *efulefus* or the 'misfits' '...worthless, empty men...a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle.' The priestess Chielo calls the converts 'the excrement of the clan' and the new religion 'a mad dog that had come to eat it up' (Ibid130). Adimora-Ezeigbo depicts the new religion as 'a puzzle' that embraced 'sheep as well as wolves', 'healthy as well as disease-ravaged people', 'normal as well as mad people'. It seemed to be a subaltern religion designed to absorb all the 'flotsam and jetsam' (89). In the three-tiered inherently exclusive symbolic Igbo society of *Amadi*, *Ohu* and *Osu*, the *Osus* or the 'outcasts' formed the dissatisfied fringe. With the advent of the colonial church, the *Osus* were naturally the first to be converted. Quick to convert also were the hounded weaker elements of Igbo society, the progenitors of 'twins' or 'anomalies'. Such willing converts naturally helped reinforce the colonial structure.

Conversions sometimes coincided with the internal desire for reform and change. Nwoye in *Things Fall Apart* is haunted by the ritual murder of Ikemefuna and the cries of the abandoned twins. Christianity forbade the practice of throwing newborn twins into the Evil Forest. Nwoye's long-troubled spirit is embalmed, he embraces Christianity:

The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul ¾ the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul. (Achebe 1995: 134)

Mr. Brown's was the benign face of the 'Civilizing Mission'; he was willing to discuss Igbo cosmology while quietly converting willing Igbos and rescuing occasional twins from the Evil Forest. Mr. Brown worked more on common sense and expediency and less on Christian charity. Realizing that 'a frontal attack' on the traditional order would never succeed he constructed 'a school and a little hospital in Umuofia' (Ibid 163). His subtle machinations lay the foundation for a Christian stronghold so absolute, that even Rev. Smith, his arrogant successor, who trod his soft inroads into Igbo terrain with iron boots, a fundamentalist and racist ['He saw things as black and white. And black was evil' (Ibid 166)] was unable to shake it. In Mr. Brown and Rev. Smith, Achebe draws the extreme prototypes of the 'civilizing mission.' Mr. Brown, with his placatory strategy and self-effacing attitude, penetrated the very marrow of the Igbo world. Rev. Smith, with his arrogant aggressive thrust broke the kinship bonds. His racial hatred was indeed spectacular. His was the pathological cruelty of the 'Civilizing mission.' The Igbos were formally introduced to the race rift, to use Foucault's words both 'insidious' and 'spectacular'.

The tribal symbolic order collapsed. 'Erima' or 'solidarity', which held the clan together, weakened. As Obierika sadly says,

"The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." (Ibid 160)

Christianity shattered the foundations of the tribal religion; the Church led many astray: 'Not only the low-born and the outcast but sometimes a worthy man had joined it.' (Ibid 157)

What is Achebe's position in this racist-colonial discourse of conversions? His cohesive, secure, dignified and apparently stable Igbo symbolic order succumbed to the sudden merciless onslaught of a racial force with strong religious underpinnings. The hitherto cohesive societal structure patterned on merit and age was shattered by racio-colonial consumerist capitalist intrusion. The old order gave way to the new; the colonial Igbo society was restructured along religio-racial lines. While the blatant race divide between white and black, colonizer and colonized was apparent, colonial Christianity too became a race divide, the converted Igbos were 'the people of the church' and the

traditional ‘pagan’ Igbos ‘the people of nothing’: In the language of the colonizer, Achebe, a second-generation Christian convert, challenges the colonizer’s story of the Igbo and the Igbo worldview. Does Achebe present an impartial insider’s story — ‘perhaps someone ought to try and look at this from the inside’ — as he claims to do? (Duerden and Pieterse 4) Or does he play into the colonizer’s game of discourse, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps at unguarded moments?

Colonialism revolved around a fundamental contradiction. It constructed and was constructed by the exploitative racial binary opposition between the ‘self’ and the ‘other.’ Yet its justifying ideology ‘the civilizing mission’ advocated ‘the white man’s burden’ as the need to ‘convert’, to ‘educate’ and to ‘civilize’ the ‘native.’ This attempt to ‘co-opt’ the colonial ‘other’ showed that the racio-religious rift could be crossed. The very effort to ‘convert’ rested on the assumption that the unbridgeable gap or difference between the colonizer and the colonized could be bridged. The images of the erstwhile Renaissance ‘noble savage’ the colonial ‘converted heathen’ and ‘educated native’ refused reconciliation with the idea of absolute difference.

This inherent contradiction was seized and utilized by the colonial other. Thus in *Things Fall Apart* the white District Commissioner’s words are written by Achebe, the colonized other, whose traumatic identity is the result of political violence and human violation. While the white District Commissioner writes to compress the history of Umuofia into a general text of colonization, Achebe writes to liberate his people from that text. Achebe’s narrative functions as a compensation or ‘supplement’ as Derrida would call it, for a historical experience that has been written out of existence in colonial discourse. The distorted colonial discourse shows an immense ‘gap’ in its representation of the temporal development of Africa. Achebe attempts to fill this ‘gap’ in the colonial text.

### Phase 3: Territorially Ambitious Colonial-Powered Conversions

The relationship between colonialism and Christianity was amazingly symbiotic. The heady and ambitious dual projects of colonization and religion resulted in the zealotry of missionary conversions of the native as well as the assignation of demi-god stature to the anthropologist administrator. Christianity transformed into steel reinforcement ¾ the bulwark of the colonial power structure, an effective weapon for empire building. The neo-converts overtly aided in their own violation:

...how Umuga could act together and resist the domination of *kosiri* and his agents if sons and daughters of the land chase after the white man’s religion and customs.’ (Adimora-Ezeigbo 87)

With active colonial support, this near-subaltern religion gained tremendous momentum and grew at an alarming proportion to near consume an entire continent. So ambitious was this religion that it did not hesitate to convert even 'cannibals'. In *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, Rev. G.T. Basden reveals his acceptance of 'cannibals' into the sacrosanct missionary fold. Conversion to Christianity was supposed to redeem 'natives' of the unforgivable sin of cannibalism. His carriers who gleefully discuss cannibal feasts, 'choicest tit-bits...were the knuckles' go on to preach the gospel: 'Since then they have all become Christians, and one is a very successful and much respected evangelist.' (*Among the Ibos of Nigeria* 40)

The early missionary ventures into traditional tribal territory were strongly backed by a cruel colonial reinforcement structure. The flourishing colonial trade, along the harbor towns on the Niger, created an administrative structure at these outposts. Colonial avarice hugely stimulated by highly profitable, cruelly exploitative and indecently monopolistic trade maneuvers encouraged forays into the so far untrodden pristine lands. Ambitious Christianity, with its fatal attraction for more and more conversions, was expected to pave the way for these colonial ventures. The colonial tactics were brutally simple – the grant of grotesque colonial privileges to tribes which welcomed the Christian missionaries, followed by the colonial machinery, and pathologically atrocious 'collective punishment' for tribes which dared resist the colonial inroads into the traditional world order. Ideology as the Marxist 'camera obscura' justified the religio-racio-colonization of Igbo Nigeria as the ushering in of 'modern civilization.' Colonial genocide spectacular in its use of advanced military power came honey-coded as 'pacification.' Perhaps colonialism utilized Christianity as an 'imperialist tool' (Walker 266) to construct a vertical white-black, colonizer-colonized, Christian-pagan divide in the mostly horizontal stateless Igbo politico-economic-cultural ethos.

Colonialism re-centered the marginalized. The neo-converts, mostly *efulefus*, *osus*, and the abnormal and alienated elements of Igbo tribal society became the colonial 'worthies', in other words colonial stooges or puppets in Igbo Christian colonial society. The spaces of exclusion were appropriated by the colonial structure. A semantic crisis developed as the hierarchy of values stood questioned and meanings reversed. Colonial Christianity could perhaps be read as an oblique manifestation of the Gramscian notion of 'part voluntary consent' of the coerced in his own coercion. In the Igbo context, it almost seems as if the consent of *efulefus* and *osus*, in other words, the marginalized, perhaps more voluntary than contrived, was implicated to coerce the majority, the anti-colonial 'pagans'.

Enoch's sacrilegious unmasking of an Egwugwu in public, the violator

of traditional religion by an over-zealous neo-convert, served as a premonition of brutal rape of an ancient value system by her own sons turned colonial stooges: 'Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion' (Achebe 1995: 168). The African psyche was dislocated and the traditional religion was crushed under the weight of Christianity. The excessive zeal of the neo-converts made any reconciliation with the tolerant traditionalists difficult.

Such was the power of the new religion that Chike's father though not of *osu* descent dared to marry an *osu* woman Sarah 'in the name of Christianity.' And Sarah, under the patronage of Christianity taught her children not to eat at their neighbours' houses because "they offered their food to idols." Chike refused to eat "heathen food", the neighbour full of indignation and rage, was nevertheless forced to control herself 'and only muttered under her breath that even an *Osu* was full of pride nowadays, thanks to the white man' (Achebe 1982: 35-36).

#### Phase 4: Power-Cash Conversions

The British administrative policy of 'indirect rule' through 'native institutions' led to the construction and subsequent imposition of paramount chieftaincy on a stateless democratic socio-political ethos previously governed by social consensus. This superimposition of paramount chieftaincy amounted to a colonial restructuring of Igbo hierarchy and caused the vertical power line to penetrate the all black colonized world, constructing black-black polarities where none existed before.

Christianity added a critical dimension to the intra-black vertical divide. Certain men of traditional Igbo society, worthy and titled succumbed to the lure of Christian-colonial privileges, especially medical and educational facilities, and either converted personally or allowed at least one son to convert, a must for the grant of favors. Ezeulu in *Arrow Of God* allows his son Oduche to be converted, to attend the church school to acquire the white man's knowledge:

"I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eye there...if there is something there you will bring home my share. ... those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known tomorrow.*" (Achebe 1988a: 365)

The kinship bonds weakened. Christian-colonialism divided the society against itself.

The disoriented neo-converts privileged in their easy acceptance of the colonial religion became upwardly mobile in the colonial power structure. Turkington speaks of 'the detribalized African' belonging neither to his tribe

nor to the intruders 'whose actions are dictated solely by personal gain and expediency' (*Chinua Achebe: Things Fall Apart* 22). It was the 'white man's money' which lured most, closely followed by the lure of administrative power positions. These neo-converts transformed into court clerks and court messengers – the hated '*kotmas*':

These court messengers were greatly hated in Umuofia because they were ... arrogant and high handed. ... They guarded the prison, which was full of men who had offended against the white man's law. (Achebe 1995: 158)

The corrupt '*kotmas*' amassed huge money: 'fifty bags would go to the court messengers, who had increased the fine for that purpose' (*Ibid* 177). Some of the neo-converts went on to serve as teachers in the mission 'bush' schools. In the Indian context, the colonial machinery constructed a similar class of '*babu*s' to occupy the lower rungs of the administration. This was the class of "cultural dopes"; intoxicated by power and colonial benefits this sector termed everything native inferior. (cited in Easthope 79) Gradually this feeling of acute inferiority consumed the entire people. Conversion to the colonial religion and the lure of colonial money and power made the 'other' actively aid in his own co-optation thus igniting the debate about the complex positioning of the colonial subject.

The complex positioning of the culturally converted colonizer merits attention. Colonial regimes enforced stringent cultural and racial segregation; covert interactions between the colonizer and the colonized nevertheless persisted. Miscegenation constituted a problematic colonial reality. 'Hybridization' remained a latent threat. If blackness could be washed white, it automatically meant that whiteness was vulnerable to pollution. The recurrent images in Renaissance literature of blacks, Moors, heathens, the 'others', converting to Christianity concealed an acute anxiety, the threat of Christians 'turning Turk.' If the image of Christianity washing the 'heathen black' to 'civilized white' served as a major justification for colonial loot and plunder, then the converse image of the 'heathen black' contaminating the 'civilized white' became a major racio-cultural anxiety. The Renaissance fear of 'turning Turk' traversed centuries to convert into the colonial fear of 'going native.' 'Going native' epitomized all racio-religio-cultural betrayals and desertions.

The crossing of boundaries was always dangerous. For those attracted or sympathetic to the alien space or people, 'going native' was a potential threat. Sympathy for the native created a brand of possessive administrators like Winterbottom 'the man on the spot who knew his African' (Achebe 1988a: 376). Underneath such possessiveness however lay an acute fear of 'going native':

Dressing for dinner was very irksome in the heat, but...it was quiet imperative. ...it was a general tonic...to survive in this demoralizing country. For to neglect it could become the first step on the slippery gradient of even profounder repudiations. (Achebe 1988a: 351)

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's journey down the Congo into 'the heart of darkness' was also a journey into the primordial recesses of humanity, transgressive sexuality, madness and Africa (Conrad: 1989). In this novel, as in master narratives in general, Africa was reduced to a land where the European mind disintegrated and regressed into a primitive state. Africa, India, China the 'othered' lands induced madness, they were madness personified. Brantlinger reveals that for Conrad 'the ultimate atrocity' was not 'some form of tribal savagery', but 'Kurtz's regression': 'Kurtz has become "tropenkollerend" or "maddened by the tropics"; he has "gone native.'" (Brantlinger 212)

#### **Phase 5: The Power-Consumerism Converted Generation**

Dazed under the assault of colonialism, the traditional Igbo world order remained in a state of virtual cultural petrification, while tribal values were covertly and overtly corrupted. The final awakening of the Igbo world order from its paralysis was helplessly impotent and much too late. It had lost its right of social control over unbridled personal power and avarice. The second generation Igbo Christian converts was too power-drunken and steeped in consumerist city culture to heed 'the will of the village.' Frantz Fanon's psychically dislocated spilt subject perhaps cannot serve as the paradigmatic colonized subject, nevertheless this subject was the prototype for the native elite, those educated within and invited to be mobile within colonial systems. The masses on the colonial margins naturally did not fit into this model.

The native elites successfully internalized the Euro-centric cultural practices that devalued all native value systems, the traditional communal control tilted in favor of blatant consumerism and rampant individualism. This second generation Euro-educated, perhaps pseudo-educated Igbos, looked down on the traditional patterns with contempt and yet succumbed to its negative forces, they had neither the desire nor the integrity to challenge these forces. As Achebe shows in *No Longer at Ease*, the granting of dignity and equal status to the *Osus* even by the second generation Christian society remained impossible.

This breed, contemptuously termed 'beast of no nation,' whiled away their colonial privileges, in the form of swanky Euro-colonial jobs, flaunted their western education and inculcated corrupt exploitative colonial practices. The

rapid deterioration in value systems is evident in Joseph's callous comment: "She was a nice girl. ... She was simply mad about me, and she was a virgin ... which is very rare here." Similarly Euro-educated Christopher suffers no qualms about his inability to challenge the exploitative hierarchies within the tradition "...I am not going to marry an *osu*" (Achebe 1988b:185, 290) His nauseating views on women and bribery indicate the typical irresponsible attitudes of this 'me-only' generation:

"No man wants to part with his money. If you accept money from a man you make him poorer. But if you go to bed with a girl who asks for it, I don't see that you have done any harm." (Ibid 272)

The construction of this culturally converted breed was an ingenious colonial device designed to reinforce the exploitative colonial structures. This carefully crafted puppet parroting colonized was the supreme creation of the colonizer. Macaulay, the architect of English education in India, in his historic *Minute on Indian Education*, delineated the aim of English education in India to be the construction of natives "Indian in blood and colour" but "English in taste, in opinions, in moral, and in intellect". Anderson terms the colonial educational policies aimed to construct Macaulay's Europeanized natives as "mental miscegenation" (cited in Loomba: 173). Macaulay's perfect 'native', the parroting-Indian-surrogate-Englishman, carefully differentiated himself from the 'ignorant' native masses and reinforced British interests in a vast and potentially unruly land. Maracle in *I Am Woman* speaks of a similar breed of 'crippled two tongues' in the Native Indian/Canadian context. She is terrified of the prospect herself: 'Lest I have no one language but become a crippled two-tongue' (85). Angelou in *All Gods Children Need Traveling Shoes* (1991) speaks of a similar breed of 'beentoos' in the Ghanaian context, those who have traveled abroad and flaunt it at every opportunity. Such crippled colonized mimicked but never exactly reproduced the superior colonial values. The recognition of this perpetual gap ensured their permanent psychological subjection.

The vertical intra-black divide was thus sharpened. The two polarities now transformed into the black elites and the black masses. The neo-converts became the neo-elites. Transition from the general masses to the exclusive elites depended on the white man's educational degree: 'A university degree was the philosopher's stone. ... It raised a man from the masses to the elite...' (Achebe 1988b:248). In an astute move of colonial reversal the neo-converts/neo-elites, overtly patronized by Christian colonialism as loyal colonial puppets, granted certain colonial sops, sought to assume totalitarian power with foreign (erstwhile colonial) benediction, in post, rather neo-colonial

independent Nigeria. The 'subaltern', often the worthless, assumed center-stage and went on to become the dominant exploitative section in the colonial and the post-colonial arena. This phantasmagorical restructuring of traditional Igbo hegemony resulted in multiple class/clan/tribe wars in post-independence Nigeria.

Instances wherein conversion and acceptance of colonial values resulted from the desire of a certain clan not to be left behind in the colonial race were not unknown. The final blow colonialism dealt was the addition of a horizontal dimension to the erstwhile vertical divide – tribal rifts were constructed and carefully nourished:

"People from Elumelu, Aninta, Umuofia, Mbaino, they control the great new market. ... We have no share in the market; we have no share in the white man's office; we have no share anywhere."

(Achebe 1988a: 494)

This venom consumed the nationalist politics of independent Nigeria where every tribe desired a larger piece of the national cake. The so-called nationalist ministers like Chief Nanga fostered this feeling of tribal rivalry: "“We shouldn't leave everything to the highland tribes. ... our people must press for their fair share of the national cake.”" (Ibid 12) Such inter tribal rifts caused the tragic Biafran War in independent Nigeria. Maracle, in the native Indian/Canadian context, portrays the inculcation of such divisive and reductive politics by a 'self-imposed leadership' who decided on the recipients of 'the lion's share of the pie' (*I am Woman* 126-127).

#### Phase 6: Neo-Colonial Eco-Cultural Conversion

The formation of multiple nation states/ 'neo-colonies' was the ushering in of imperialism by colonialism: '...Africa broke out so spectacularly in a rash of independent nation states!' (Achebe 1989b: 128) With Euro-American tutored, remote controlled black monstrosity positioned at the top it was the birth of neo-colonialism:

The real danger today is from that fat, adolescent and delinquent millionaire, America, and from all those virulent, misshapen freaks like Amin and Bokassa sired on Africa by Europe. (Ibid 47)

Achebe finds such much-flaunted independence meaningless as 'the old white master' still retained all power: 'He had got himself a bunch of black stooges to do his dirty work for a commission.' (cited in Ezenwa-Ohaeto 137) The 'imperial country', the 'metropole', now remote controlled the 'neo-colony', the 'margin.' The same country was thus post-colonial formally independent and neo-colonial economically and/or culturally dependent.

While the elite-mass division could be bridged in colonial Nigeria by the acquisition of the magic university degree, in the 'post' colonial state the vertical rift expanded dramatically to construct wider polarities. The two classes now were the 'luxury-yatch-cruising oppressor' and the 'trudging-jigger-toed oppressed' (Achebe 1989b: 127). The rift between the 'elite' and the 'subaltern' in neocolonial times subsumed the erstwhile divide between the colonizer and the colonized. The oppressor took pains to ensure that the divide remained unchallenged, that 'the benefits of modern life will ever remain outside the dreams of the real victims of exploitation in rural villages' (Ibid146). To Achebe the present-day disoriented African leadership, power-crazy and singularly irresponsible to the people, was the grotesque construction of this colonial process:

The colonial regime did not inculcate democracy in the colonized. ...they encouraged irresponsibility. When the District Officer...appointed somebody... "warrant chief" ...that man knew he was not supposed to pay any attention to the people. He was supposed to pay attention to the D.O. ... (cited in Ezenwa-Ohaeto119)

This is the era of eco-cultural colonization/conversion. Unholy 'decolonized' colonizer/ colonized alliances cause rampant capital-consumerist invasion of the erstwhile colonies. No borders exist for the uninterrupted flow of imperialism from the first to the third worlds. Imperialism encourages the maintenance of borders in the third world, so long such borders exist and consequent conflicts weaken the nations, it can continue its borderless existence consuming each third world country individually. The imperial twin 'consumerism', in sophisticated parlance termed 'globalization' engulfs even those lands spared the direct assault of imperialism. This neo-colonial era reduces human beings to branded consumables, wrenched of identity.

Such eco-culturally converted societies are tragically divided, exposing vertical class divides and horizontal inter-tribe divides. Achebe refuses to gloss. With devastating honesty he portrays the repressive structures within his own culture. Achebe speaks with quiet conviction of the need for reform. Society as the individual can perhaps withstand slow constructive change, 're-form.' Achebe advocates the acceptance of progress 'piecemeal, slow and undramatic' (1989b: 90-91).

Achebe believes that the graceful acceptance of alternative patterns would ensure for Africa a dignified, tranquil future unlike its raped embittered history. He calls for the creation of a 'community of blood', blood that connects blood beyond barriers, beyond class, tribe, religion, culture and nation. (Ibid 202)

## Crossing Frontiers / Engulfing Conversions: Achebe's Igboland Colonial to Neo-Colonial

He envisions the removal of gender barriers. Assigning women the primal role in reformation and social change, he advocates a role reversal, the acceptance of an alternative more humane reconciliatory female leadership. Achebe's vision of future Africa seeks the merging of the traditional and the western. The two strands would cohabit in harmony without one assimilating the other.

Achebe calls for the acceptance of a shared past by both colonizer and colonized. Retrieving the positive strands of a shared history would perhaps bestow a better universe to future generations. Perhaps Irigaray's remarkable mother-fetus nourishing relationship where one grows without damage to the other would guide all future relationships between Euro-America and Africa, the self and the other. (*je, tu, nous* 45)

Achebe's future Africa would be healed of its historic wounds by the dance of the religions. All three significant religions traditional, Christianity and Islam become united in the holy dance performed by Beatrice, Agatha and Aina. (1989b: 208) Achebe sojourns in his creative vision to a more equitable and all encompassing world order. He dreams of a less hierarchical, less divided universe. Disillusioned with the postcolonial world perhaps he envisions a post-exploitative era.

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# Uncracking India: Raja Rao's Non-Duality

*Sanjukta Das*

The allusion to the Indian title of Bapsi Sidhwa's novel on the Partition, *Cracking India* (1991) attempts to read Raja Rao's story 'India – A Fable' (1947) with reference to the genre now known as 'Partition Narrative' woven around the split that marked the births of the modern nations — India and Pakistan. All these narratives from Sadat Hassan Manto's 'Toba Tek Singh' in Urdu to Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines* (1988) in English reiterate in different ways the demonic divide hastily drawn by a British cartographer at the behest of an Empire whose sun had finally set. Yet Rao's short story appearing in 1947 defines a unique India beyond all boundaries. The story elects to rise above the historical and aspires to the metaphysical. Much as Jhumpa Lahiri indicates by the word 'beyond', in the Indian edition subtitle to *The Interpreter of Maladies: stories of bengal, boston and beyond* (2000) an alternative and more evolved space outside territorial, political boundaries, the India that Raja Rao writes of is qualified by him as 'A Fable', thereby locating this India beyond man-made boundaries and concrete reality.

This abstract construction of India at a time when the nation was caught in the birth pangs of its concrete historic existence invites interrogation. Especially since Rao builds his India by drawing upon the philosophy of non-duality propounded by an eighth century Brahmin scholar Sankara who had honed the idea of non-duality passed down to him through two generations of teacher-philosophers. Sankara's life involved travelling to various centres of learning in India and debating with several religious-philosophical sects such as Charvakas, Kapalikas, Shakas, Sankhyas and Buddhas, to establish the primacy of non-duality. He established several mutts in India, the most well known being the Sringeri Mutt in Raja Rao's native Karnataka (then Mysore), amidst scenic surroundings.

Yet Raja Rao (1908-2006) born into a Brahmin family of Karnataka had more than the usual exposure to non-Brahminical and even non-Hindu environments. After schooling in Hyderabad where his father taught at a college, Rao attended the Aligarh Muslim University.

In 1929 he graduated with a B.A. in English and History, and then, on a scholarship awarded by the government of Hyderabad, left for the *Collège des Ecossais*, Montpellier in France. There he studied French language and literature, and later at the Sorbonne where he studied the Indian influence on Irish literature,

under the supervision of Louis Cazamian. In 1932, Rao was appointed to the editorial board of *Mercure de France* (Paris), a position he held until 1937. It was from his grandfather, who spoke not a word of English, and was often absorbed in meditation, that Rao got his philosophic bent. So while living in France he made a brief visit to India, in 1933, and lived for a while in an ashram. He finally left France in 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II...

Having arrived in India he met Sri Aurobindo, and then went on to live in Raman Maharshi's ashram in Tiruvannamalai, Madras. In 1942 he spent six months in Mahatma Gandhi's ashram in Sevagram, and in 1943 he met his guru Sri Atmananda, at Tiruvallapuram in Travancore. In 1948 Rao returned to France, and visited the USA in 1950. In 1958 he travelled to India again, this time in the distinguished company of André Malraux. Back in the USA, in 1966 he began teaching Indian philosophy at the University of Texas in Austin, from where he retired as Emeritus Professor in 1980 (Aikant)

Rao is somewhat exceptional among the well known writers of Indian English literature hailing from the southern states of India — A K Ramanujan, R Parthasarathy and Kamala Das — because of his spiritual affiliations to Vedanta philosophy and his movement towards English via French. His association with Aurobindo the firebrand Bengali nationalist-turned-spiritual leader and poet who too had a French link through 'Mother', his stay at Gandhi's ashram at Sevagram, his time spent at the ashrams of Hindu spiritual gurus such as Raman Maharshi and Sri Atmananda explain his concern with the spiritual side of life. Gandhi who fashioned a unique form of indigeneity or nativism dissolving caste and creed borders, as resistance to foreign rule and whose program of satyagraha and ahimsa began with the individual's inner resources, Rao's student days at a Muslim University, his subsequent sojourn in Catholic France, his dissertation on Irish literature at a French University, was a long training in the assimilation of differences. In fact it is Rao's habitation of multiple cultural spaces that allows one to read his expression of the Indian ethos of non-duality as an informed countering of colonial influence. Rao's famous 'Preface' to *Kanthapura* suggests that language does not matter if the spirit is one's own.

*Kanthapura* is in many ways a narrative about the power of ideas and words. The transformation wrought in a distant village so that it connects with the larger current sweeping the country, the power of the imagination which made possible the magical hold of Gandhi on the masses, in other words, the inter-

linkage of the local and specific with the general and abstract is a feature common to both *Kanthapura* and 'India — A Fable'. The story 'India — A Fable' was published in 1947. As the biographical sketch by Aikant shows, Rao had returned to India in 1939 and stayed here until 1948. The story may have been written during this stay in India or it may have been sketched earlier, at the time that Rao, like the narrative persona Raja in the story, was a young student in France. The 'India' that the story constructs is an ideational India, an India that a little French boy can inhabit while sitting in a park in France. The line from Sri Sankara, 'Non-duality alone is auspicious' quoted before the story begins, makes the narrative an exposition of a thesis about unity of vision. It is therefore a 'fable'.

It is remarkable that Raja Rao has set this story in the time and region that is associated with the birth of Modernism — Paris of the early twentieth century. It was in Paris that exiles from England, Ireland, Russia and America had congregated to create the poetry, novels, stories and art expressing the alienation and fragmentation of sensibility that came to be called Modernism. Modernist writers such as Yeats and Eliot and artists such as Picasso sought answers from outside the existing structures of belief of their immediate environments. For Yeats it was the invention of a private myth, for Eliot a fervid seeking through the Church of England and leading to the Sanskrit lines in *The Wasteland*. Eliot had advocated a version of 'non-duality' through his praise of the 'unified sensibility' of Marvell and the Metaphysical Poets, in contrast to the 'dissociation of sensibility' of later writers. Picasso had discovered in African and other primitive and tribal artefacts an organic connecting design that needed to be drawn into European art. Modernism may be seen as an anguished cry at duality and a seeking for non-duality. It must be borne in mind that this was also the period of the discovery of Tagore's work by the West, by Yeats, and of Gandhi forging his idea of *Swaraj*. Rao's vision of India imbricates all these developments. It is Sankara's philosophy that allows him to integrate all these things into a unified vision. The faith in India the nation, the euphoria of freedom that is manifest in the word 'India' in the title gives the story a historicity. At the same time Sankara's location within a Brahminical intellectual tradition opens Rao's story to charges of religion and caste bias in today's political-correctness-sensitive environment. It is this shadow on the story that this article seeks to explore.

The construction of 'India' in the story begins with defining its difference from 'Arabia'. The first part of the conversation between the narrator and the French child Pierrot, who is dragging a wooden camel, begins with the author asking, "Where are you going?" To this the boy replies "To the oasis of Arabia". The author asks "Where's that". And again "Do you know where your oasis

is?" The child replies, "Oh, yes, the oasis is all water, and big like this and my camel goes there to drink". (Rao 201-2) Later the pattern is reversed. On learning that his interlocutor is called Raja and that 'It means a prince', the boy says, "Then you are like Rudolphe. Rudolphe is the Prince of the Oasis and of Arabia. And you?" "Of India?" suggests the narrator. "And where is India", asks the child. "O far, very far" says the man. Pierrot asks if India has much sand and many camels. The man replies that there is not much sand and that they have elephants. (Rao 204) He is insistent about this distinction. Later still when the child hears the new story about goddesses and states that they (the goddesses) go down to the oasis to drink water, the narrator corrects him at once, "No not to the oasis," he says "But to the rivers". The child asks, "And the goddesses — they come riding on camels?" "No, I told you they ride elephants." (Rao 205) So the India that Raja constructs with its rivers, forests and elephants, as distinct from Arabia with its sand, oasis and camels, is really south India. Rao however astutely mentions the Ganges, because it is the only Indian river known to the West. Raja Rao chooses to ignore the fact that India has deserts and camels too, in the Kutch and Rajasthan regions. Besides given the fact that the story appeared in 1947, after the bloodbath of the Partition, and the establishment of secular India, the India in Raja Rao's story represents an essentially Hindu India represented by goddesses. Yet Raja Rao also seems to divest from his goddesses all veneer of religion and divinity describing them as 'ladies with four arms and a golden crown on their heads', (Rao 204) and as "One who is dark as a bee, and the other who is blonde as butter" (Ibid 205) The line suggests a genuine attempt on the narrator's part to translate his information in terms that a French non-Hindu child may understand; but in doing so he also transforms the goddesses from religious figures to mythological ones. This distinction is important in order to read the fable as its narrator Raja would want it to be read, rather than as Hindu hegemonic mythmaking.

The fact that the fable is imparted to a child suggests that the reading of Rao's story requires a mind unblemished by adult scepticism, in other words a childlike mind — credulous and creative. The Arabia of the child's imagination where Rudolphe rides a camel could be derived from the stories of the *Arabian Nights* which overtook the European imagination after its first translation into a European language (French) by Antoine Galland in the early eighteenth century. But the 1940s, in which Rao's story appeared, was when 'Arabia' or the Arab world was overtaken by the British army and simmering with the tensions of Jewish settlements in Palestine. For an Indian reader today the French child's fantasy of a Rudolphe in Arabia is ironical as it evokes the figure of T E Lawrence, soldier in the British Army during World War

I, but campaigner for Arab independence. Lawrence's struggle between his English birth and Arab sympathy, popularised by David Lean's 1962 film *Lawrence of Arabia* is relevant to the story of Pierrot and Raja which too is about the transcending of political identities, in other words about the dissolution of dualities.

The child's original fantasy as well as the narrator's fantasy is woven around marriages. At the opening of the story the narrator sits under the statue of Anne of Austria at the Luxembourg gardens taking in the scene. His mind is a jumble of several thoughts, one of which is about morganatic marriages. The thought probably comes to him from the statues of European monarchs — eighteen in all including Anne of Austria — placed all over the garden. Since monarchs all across Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were related to each other by blood and kinship. Whether this kinship between European monarchs helped to keep Europe united, is a question that lies between the lines of a story about a nation that came into being through a violent splintering of its former state.

Rao's story hinges upon the streams of consciousness of the narrator and the child. The thoughts take flight from some link in the setting. Right at the outset Rao also plants clues to the nature of his story. He describes first of all the setting, the Luxembourg garden on that day through a series of rich sensory details —

... cold winds blew in April, and then the immense sunshine came.  
The pools were transparent, the sky full of ochre clouds, the trees  
cut through the air with their leaves, the earth was hot. (Rao 201)

Then he describes the people, working-class old men and women, female students from the university reading books, and young men who slept. But he also mentions the books that the 'Sorbonnard' girls are reading — 'D'Alembert or Henry Becque'. It is perhaps no coincidence that Jean Le Rond d'Alembert, a mathematician and philosopher who edited the famous *Encyclopaedia* of the sciences and arts along with other intellectuals of the age argued in *Discourse préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* or *Preface to the Encyclopaedia* that, "good facilities for rendering and receiving ideas through mutual exchange also result in indisputable advantages, it is not surprising that people more and more tried to develop these possibilities. For that purpose they started to reduce the signs to words, since words are the symbols that are easiest to handle". A 'materialist with regard to the physical world and an agnostic in religion' D'Alembert's philosophical position forms one of the reference points for Rao's story which is about the development of a vision through dialogue and in a setting (the Luxembourg gardens) whose material

details have been documented as carefully as the details of the imaginary wedding of the two goddesses. The Luxembourg gardens with its famous fountains and sculptures of scenes from Greek mythology, and statues of actual monarchs and queens, (Le Jardin du Luxembourg) is the appropriate setting for a story about kings, queens, princes, and goddesses. The second author that Raja Rao mentions the Sorbonnard girls to be reading in the park is Henry Becque (Tilden 'Introduction') who conceived the idea of a "cruel theatre," in which truth should go defiantly bare. In an age of romanticism in literature Becque went about exposing the mundane side of romance and passion. Raja Rao's mention of the specific authors that the girls were reading provides, like the epigraph by Sankara, the intellectual setting for the story. The springtime of the Sorbonnard girl's life was being wasted away in reading and would make her become like the fat old queen, observes the narrator. Unlike Becque Raja Rao's vision is one of romance and passion. What could be more romantic than a philosophical proposition such as non-duality in an age of World Wars? Yet Gandhi had shown through satyagraha how one could turn a philosophical proposition into a political tool.

'India — A Fable' is about the imagination, about the need for a vision. The 'imaginary world that the child constructs with the help of Raja is made as valid, as real as the tactile material world that Raja perceives around him. It draws from the material realities around it but partly through stream of consciousness and partly through faith achieves an existence independent of its tangible surroundings. Rao's vision of India in this respect is somewhat like Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), about a young woman struggling to complete a painting over several years. The picture when it is done is not great art but Woolf writes of her painter — She had had her vision. That was enough. Here vision stands for comprehension of the connections between persons and between persons and things.

The actual flesh-and-blood romance of the nanny Jeannot, carried on behind a tree in the park, while the child Pierrot journeys through his fantasies, seems to coalesce with the imaginary weddings of the Indian goddesses and of Rudolphe and Katherine. The child says "Everyday there is a wedding in the oasis". Does it suggest that the Luxembourg gardens with its pools and fountains are an oasis in the city of Paris where everyday lovers meet to marry later? The story ends with Jeannot (presumably married) replaced by a new nanny. In this story 'wedding' becomes a metaphor for unity or non-duality; for the resolution of differences into a creative whole. In a sense the fantasy created by the child and the man is a union too. At the end of their exchange when the child has finally entered the 'reality' of India he tells his nanny, the young Jeannot, "Do you know where we are?" "At the Luxembourg", she

replies. He denies this and tells her "We are far, far away, fifteen days by steamship. . . There are forests . . . elephants . . . the Ganges. . ." But Jeannot who cannot enter the child's world has nevertheless her own impressions of the 'reality' around her. She turns round to the fountain near the gate and finds that her 'young man was gone, and the path had gone with him. The leaves were black against a grey sky'. The material landscape thus seems to change with the perception of the eyes gazing upon it.

The story maintains this dialectic between the real and the unreal until it is no longer easy to distinguish between the two. Pierrot hugs Jeannot and says that she was his only princess. Jeannot affectionately announces to the child, "Oh, yes, I am your sweetheart".(Rao 207) The Sorbonna girl looks up from her book and muses. It is at this point that the narrator comments that time 'flies in the spring' and one should not become like some 'Anne of Austria'. The narrator's dislike of Anne of Austria has already been expressed through the description of her overbearing statue. In her portrait (Rubens) Anne is shown as a heavy set woman. An Infanta of Spain and the consort of Louis XIII of France, Anne bore a son, Louis XIV, after twenty three childless years. In fact the park is marked by other prosaic entities. There are 'old men with coughs' and 'old fat women' beside the Sorbonna girl who let the spring day fly reading heavy tomes.

At the end of the story Pierrot rushes towards the Medici fountain shouting that he is in India. The actual Medici fountain at the Luxembourg gardens with its sculpture of horses, and mythological figures becomes invisible to the child. He sees instead his imaginary elephant drinking at the fountain and the two four-armed Indian goddesses. In fact he looks at the water and tells the narrator, "Look, there's your country. How beautiful it is."(Rao 208) The narrator looks up at the sky and sees clouds sailing like boats. He remarks to himself, 'One of them had already reached the other shore, was safe in harbour' (Ibid) Does the narrator really indicate by this that Pierrot is now 'safe' because his mind has opened and received the vision of India from the narrator? Pierrot refuses to leave the fountain. The narrator writes, 'He saw the elephant in the forest. He saw the river Ganges. He saw the two goddesses with four hands and a crown of gold on their heads. He rode the elephant, covered in silk and gold, and he came to my marriage.' The narrator is alive to the tactile reality of the day in France and can simultaneously feel in memory and imagination the heat of the Indian earth. The child is shown to inhabit only the fantasy. Yet the sculptures of Greek mythological figures, the artifice of the statuary, the garden itself is a concretization of fantasy — a fantasy laid out for all who come to it but noticed only by a few such as the narrator Raja. The other visitors to the park seem impervious to all that it has to offer.

The children of course inhabit an imagined world and are able to race their toy boats in the pool to various countries of the world.

Days later, during which the narrator waits in vain for Pierrot to come to the park, he finally arrives with a different nanny, a middle aged woman. Now Pierrot tells the narrator, "I am the maharaja. I ride the elephant. The wedding is over." The story is about the connection made between two persons of disparate backgrounds and ages. Yet there is a common trait they share. Both are away from their families, alone by themselves in the park. The narrator is far away from his homeland which nevertheless pervades his mind with a kind of mythic splendour. The boy is a motherless child whose father is away in Morocco. Does the boy's fantasy of journeying to Arabia have associations with his father's journey to Morocco? Does Raja replace his father in leading him gently away from Arabia to India? Does the boy choosing India suggest his own replacement of the absent father with one present before him? The boy at one point throws his camel into the water and bursts into tears saying 'I want to go to your country' and 'Take me into your arms'. Raja seems to replace the mother (and Jeannot) as well, as he picks up the child, buys him candy and tells him the story of India. In India stories are told to children by mothers or grandmothers at home and by teachers at school. Raja the narrator becomes for the child a surrogate parent as well as guide. Story-telling becomes a medium of guidance.

The story ends with the boy discovering faces in the buttons of the narrator's Indian tunic as he had done on their first meeting. But the fact that these faces that Pierrot sees on the buttons are merely reflections of his own face signifies a blurring of distinction between self and other. The concept of non-duality being auspicious is therefore extended to mean that others are only reflections of one's own self. Sankara's philosophy rejects the tactile world as illusion and sees the *atman* or self as all pervasive and real. Everything is self according to Sankara. The mirrors (buttons) on Raja's coat are simultaneously Raja's self as well as the world's self. An apparently innocuous detail becomes the bearer of advaita or non-duality. Raja Rao thus manages to superimpose upon the scenery of the Luxembourg garden, steeped as it is—through its statuary, sculptures, and the actual construction of the garden by European royalty—in the histories and mythologies of Europe, a vision of India. Spun partly out of nostalgia and partly out of Rao's grounding in advaita Vedanta, the vision counterpoises the ethereal Indian goddesses to the stone goddesses of Greek mythology in the park. Even in his choice of goddesses (one dark as the bee, the other blonde as butter) Raja Rao emphasizes one of the dualities of the Hindu pantheon—the dark non-Aryan goddess Kali who is a contrast to the fair Aryan goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati, Durga—that is

not really a duality, for Kali is believed to be another form of Durga. This once again underlines India as a land that has absorbed and assimilated the fair and the dark, the Aryan (foreign) and the non-Aryan (indigenous). He impresses upon Pierrot this vision of India drawing him away from the earlier fantasy of Arabia. The story expresses Raja's devotion to India as well as Pierrot's need for a sustaining faith.

The title says, 'India — a Fable'. A fable is a story with a moral. The moral of this story is stated at the beginning — 'Non-duality alone is auspicious'. What are the dualities that the narrator tries to resolve? Fact and fiction, East and West, night and day, child and man, youth and old age, the concrete artifices of fountain and statuary in an actual Parisian park and imagined Nature in the pristine rivers and forests of an India of memory, fantasies concretized in stone and fantasies achieved through dialogue, a toy camel and the elephant of thought, the sterile singleness of the Sorbignon girl and the fecundity of Jeannot. Once the child has glimpsed the weddings of the two goddesses he is initiated into non-duality or unified vision. The narrator, the Indian Raja, in leading the child to that vision has attained non-duality too. This synthesis of the best of both worlds is what Raja Rao's older contemporaries in the first half of the twentieth century were emphasizing in their own ways looking beyond mere 'nation', Tagore envisioning a world-mind, and Gandhi envisioning an India dissolving divisions of caste and religion.

The story which is essentially about a mental state or perspective subverts the historic aspect of the setting, of the Luxembourg gardens. None of the visitors to the garden really inhabit the worlds represented by the sculpture, statuary or the history of the garden itself. Pierrot inhabits Arabia and then India, Raja inhabits India even as he is conscious of his physical location in the Luxembourg garden, the nanny Jeannot inhabits the space defined by herself and her lover so that when he leaves 'the path had gone with him'. (Rao 207) Even the girl from the university does not inhabit the garden but the world of her books. In response to Max Muller's enthusiasm for India Rao had observed that India was not made up of its elephants, rivers and other exotica but that "India is a perspective" (Raine). It could be argued that ultimately everything is a matter of perspective. The fact that Rao makes 'India' the 'perspective' or vision that is shared with the little French boy is nevertheless historically relevant when viewed in the context of the period around 1947 when the story was published. This was Raja Rao trying to define India for the West. The story also demonstrates to his Indian readers how India is not about closed borders but an area open to all who can connect to it through the imagination and the spirit.

Rao's Pierrot is not the first European to make the passage to India. Edward Said's thesis on 'Orientalism' gives us many names. Whitman's 1881 poem 'Passage to India' celebrating the building of the Suez Canal, and the laying of the transcontinental railroads, had moved on from India to international brotherhood and to the 'seas of God'. Whitman used the term 'fable' for India several times in section two of the poem. Section six sings of the 'marriage of continents, climates and oceans/ . . . / The lands, geographies, dancing before you, holding a festival garland, / As brides and bridegrooms hand in hand'. The last section visualizes a 'Passage to more than India' and lists the pairing of several dualities such as earth and sky, day and night, sun and moon; he urges his soul to sail farther for, 'are they not all the seas of God?' (Whitman 118-23) A Saidian reading of Whitman would contest an American poet's vision of marriage between East and West, the entering into India by America as a euphemism for imperialist advance. Raja Rao's narrative about a French boy drawn into India by his Indian interlocutor Raja posits a counter movement where the initiative comes from the Indian and could be read as an intervention in the European project that Edward Said calls 'Orientalism'. Forster's 1924 novel *A Passage to India* had demonstrated that the passage can be made in spirit only as Mrs. Moore does, not in reality as Fielding and Aziz discover, because in colonial India, the time was not right. Forster had hinted that a free India would make communion possible between Indians and the English. Rao's story suggests that in 1947 it is time that an Indian can at last guide a European into India. Where Aziz had failed by leading to a cave, and where Forster had failed by positing Mosque, Cave and Temple as the likely points of entry into India, Rao's story makes India attainable in a Parisian garden. Rao bypasses India as concrete geographical entity, thus facilitating the move away from history to myth.

In fact it is not just the theme but the form that Rao uses — picture making through story telling—that links the tale to pre-novelistic traditional Indian narratives such as fable and myth. 'The Nativization of English' cites the modes of fiction outlined by Robert Scholes and Ulrich Wicks in primitive narrative forms and suggests that Rao deftly combines in *Kanthapura*, these modes with the more modern western novelistic mode of narrative. Whereas the pre-novelistic modes locate narrative outside historic time, in 'anywhere and everywhere', the novelistic mode of narrative is bound to clock-time, and material realism. The author argues that Rao's adoption of the Puranic form in *Kanthapura* to narrate a historical event combines the two forms in a new way releasing an explosion of significations of the actual event narrated.(Mukherjee) This is a salient feature of Rao's fiction. In 'India—A Fable' Rao underlines in the title itself, the duality that his narrative will resolve

into 'non-duality'. 'India' is a nation, a physical entity with a name and political boundaries. But 'India' is also the British name for a region that stretches back far into history as *Bharata* beyond and before not just British colonialism but *before British history*. This land although called 'India' during colonial rule, and after 1947 truncated, broken, fragmented is not fully represented by the western term 'India'. The term is inadequate, circumscribing, and full of erasures. To define 'India' properly one needs a different narrative mode than history. In other words one needs a pre-novelistic mode and Rao underlines this through the qualifier in the title of his story — 'A Fable'. Rao implies that it is only through an ancient narrative mode such as the fable that one can properly understand India. The material details of the Luxembourg garden, a garden that is overwhelmingly man-made, sculpted, and therefore historic and limited are erased through the fable making of the man and child duo. Pierrot looks down into the pool of the garden and sees not the sculpted statuary in it or even the reflections of the statuary around it but what his mind's eye shows him — India. Raja looks up to the sky and sees clouds. The breeze, the sky, the trees on that day, and the 'fabled' rivers and oasis, camels and elephants represent a counterpoint to the concrete artifice of the garden in the city of Paris.

In terms of form, the documentation of the setting would belong to the written tradition, whereas the dialogue and story-making between Raja and the child, to the oral tradition. Rao is thus combining two narrative traditions in his story. The essay 'The Nativization of English' cited above demonstrates out how Rao has done this in *Kanthapura* and reads this as a strategy for creating an 'authentic' nationalist agenda. In 'India — A Fable', Rao makes the concrete invalid, and the imagined /mythical, valid. He distinguishes between the concrete and the mythical by supplying details for the concrete. Thus while describing Anne of Austria he writes, '(1629-1687?)', thus subtly implying through the dates and question mark in parentheses the unverifiability and irrelevance of such data. Raja's mind is a jumble of such facts and figures as he sits in the park on the first day—

My thoughts were about morganatic marriages, U. N .statistics, parks and books, and the *chocolate chez Alsecia rue d'Assas* whose taste would not leave my mouth. The cold wind blew over my mouth (Rao 201).

Even the chocolate is specified in documentary detail. Contrasted to these details is the description of India. In fact the 'authenticity' of Raja's India is established through the clever device of contrast with the artifice of the garden and Observatory. At the same time Pierrot is shown to draw his ideas of India as a land of forests, and forests as 'many many trees' through

association with the very specific 'Avenue de l'Observatoire, full of great forests of trees, pools and big buildings and rippling sunshine' (Rao 204). India the land of many forests is brought into being by *not being* the forests of this avenue to which Pierrot has walked with the air of one travelling very far.(Ibid) India by being farther — where one has to 'travel for fifteen days', and by 'steam boat' as against the children's sailboats in the pool, boats that are 'going to many lands'— becomes grander, distant, bigger and more attractive to Pierrot.

That Pierrot in any case lives in the land of fable — his own fable had been one of the oasis — establishes the validity of fable as well as the child mind as the original mind. But Pierrot's fable had been faulty as it was pegged upon a material object — his toy camel. This object is finally discarded by him, thrown into the water before he can 'ride the elephant', an imaginary one and a symbol associated with Hindu iconography, and enter India.

In the 1835 'Minute on Education' Macaulay had run down native literatures and posited an approach based on Enlightenment rationalism. Indian thinkers such as Rabindranath Tagore and Gandhi had stressed upon native traditions. Rao's lifespan makes him Gandhi and Tagore's contemporary as well as ours. Rao's fictional project is a nationalistic one where nationalism involves resistance to colonial hegemonic erasures not through an oppositional counter-discourse but through a mutual creative act of 'making'. India has to be made anew for the world after its 'un-making' by repressive foreign rule. Pierrot is not a passive recipient of Raja's fable. He has chosen his vehicle (elephant / imagination) his land (India in France) and his friend (not other children in the park but Raja). His choice and participation is intrinsic to the fable of India. Had Raja delivered a monologue on India there would have been no 'marriage' or dissolution of duality.

The dialogic form, the story making, or story telling style within a narrative that uses the staple features of European realism; the drawing from ancient myth and narrative forms as well as from realist novel traditions and contemporary stream-of-consciousness narratives marks the welding of eastern and western narrative forms. 'India — A Fable' shows an Indian adult carrying within him the 'fable' and imparting it to a French child. Raja the fabulist is the Eastern boatman steering the child's mind, a European mind towards his ancient land India: 'Up above the trees, the sky bore away the rapid, white clouds, and in the waters they ran like boats. One of them had already reached the other shore, was safe in harbour'(Rao 208). Pierrot's journey into India guided by Raja is a journey into release and light. It rejects the duality of light and darkness predominant in the western imagination and establishes the resolution of opposites through his two goddesses, one

white and the other black. By drawing a French boy into this India Rao makes his India available to all who can ride the elephant attended by the goddesses of night and day. Pierrot achieves his vision at dusk when night and day meet. If the Independence of India in 1947 establishes the separateness of India the nation, Rao's story appearing the same year issues to the world this passport of the fable to come to India and attend the wedding.

One may read the story in yet other ways using the tools of modern critical theory. Is Pierrot's initiation into 'India' a doubling of Raja's initiation into 'France' or 'Europe'? Is Pierrot's ability to 'enter' India related to his semi-orphan status? Is not the dream of weddings indicative of the deep loneliness that is the condition of both Raja and Pierrot? Does the metaphor of the boat reaching the shore suggest a *crossing over* in trans-cultural terms? Raja has already made the physical and intellectual crossing to the other shore, that is, France; Pierrot makes the crossing to 'India' through imagination. Do Raja and Pierrot then form an 'imagined community' redefining the 'nation' in a new way, or is Raja's 'India' in being 'a perspective' and 'a fable' *not* a nation? In *not* being a nation then does it reject the Partition and all that it represents? Does it mend the crack/ division /duality made by the Partition? Does this 'India' then reject all lines as divisive? Is then non-duality as a philosophical position about the erasure of shadow lines of division and duality? Is the 'India' in this story somewhat like 'Gandhi' in *Kanthapura* — a notion and an impulse to breach boundaries?

If Raja and Pierrot form a father-son unit in the absence of their real families, does the mother absent in this formation find representation in the goddesses and the nannies who are as fleeting as Pierrot's own dead mother? Conversely, does the mute subjectivity of the goddesses, of Pierrot's own dead mother and the new nanny make the Pierrot-Raja unit reflective of a misogyny common to both Biblical (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) and Hindu (Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwara) myths of Holy Trinity, and to the Indian *guru-shishya* tradition? Does the male bonding between Raja and Pierrot and their 'creation' of the goddesses with the power of the Word, along with Raja's disapproval of Anne of Austria (for being fat) and of the Sorbonnard girl (for reading books in the springtime) suggest a masculinist gendering of the vision of 'India' if not outright misogyny?

Could Pierrot's easy passage into the 'India' of Raja be compared to Lilia's uneasy passage into the India of her parents and Mr. Pirzada in Jhumpa Lahiri's story (Lahiri 23-42) half a century later? How does Rao's 'India' compare with the India born at midnight in Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*? Can Rushdie's novel be read as a fable of contemporary India made of auspicious pluralities

and essentially a version of non-duality, since all the different children of midnight are born of the same parent—India. It is important that we read Raja Rao's picture of India in relation these other later fictions.

Raja Rao's Brahmin descent and the source of *advaita* or non-dualistic philosophy from an Upanishadic and Brahmin- mediated source could blind us to the radicalism inherent in *advaita* as Raja Rao means it — 'auspicious'. If modern secular India is based on assimilation in principal, modern history in India and the world over also makes it difficult to ignore the dangers inherent in a philosophy that propounds assimilation. Ashish Nandy offers a psychological explanation for the assimilative feature of what he calls 'Indian culture':

Probably the uniqueness of Indian culture lies not so much in a unique ideology as in the society's traditional ability to live with cultural ambiguities and to use them to build psychological and even metaphysical defences against cultural invasions. Probably, the culture itself demands that a certain permeability of boundaries be maintained in one's self-image and that the self be not defined too tightly or separated mechanically from the not-self. This is the other side of the strategy of survival — the clue to India's post-colonial worldview. (Nandy 107)

In the same essay a little earlier, Nandy discusses Aurobindo's life and work as an attempt to recognize that —

in every situation of organized oppression the true antonyms are always the exclusive part versus the inclusive whole ... not the oppressor versus the oppressed but both of them versus the rationality which turns them into co-victims. (Nandy 99)

Nandy explains this in the following terms —

'in the chaos called India the opposite of thesis is not the antithesis because they exclude each other. The true 'enemy' if the thesis is seen to be in the synthesis because it includes the thesis and ends the latter's reason for being. It is Sankara's Vedanta ... (Ibid)

The narrator Raja at the end of the story is shown to visit the park in search of Pierrot for several days. But he no longer describes the park as he had on the first day; UN statistics and the sociology of morganatic marriages are gone from his mind, replaced with only the need to meet Pierrot. The experience of fabling India seems to have purged Raja of western science and history. The synthesis has been achieved. So the story ends with the words of the French child, "I ride the elephant. The wedding is over."

In actuality what the narrative has done is to establish an ideal India. This ideal India accommodates and dissolves dualities unlike (by implication) the real India which does not. In 1947 when the story came out the horrors of duality were only too sharply etched on the psyche of the Indian people and of the world community. Rao's story builds itself upon the events of gory dualities and divisions. Although there is no reference whatsoever in the story to the communal riots of that period, *the premise of the story are the riots*. India needed to be re-inscribed, the legacy of its ancient philosophy needed to be re-viewed, Hinduism's links with other religions reiterated. And what better way to do so than with a Christian boy in a European garden. A garden where pre-Christian pagan mythology co-exists with 'pre-Revolution monarchical personages, a garden that is both nature and art. Fables are stories with morals. The lesson of non-duality is the moral here. And in 1947 the moral was relevant not only for India steeped in the bloodbath of the Partition, but also Europe savaged by the holocaust and a US guilty of Hiroshima. Ancient Vedanta philosophy like a wise, sad father would need to lead the orphaned, lost modern age out of its strife of dualities into non-duality. The argument would be philosophical, the telling mythic but the context historical. Re-visiting Rao's narrative after sixty years it is essential to bear in mind this vision, purpose and context of the story.

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# The History of Laughter and Rabelais's *Gargantua*

*Niranjan Goswami*

Laughter is a serious matter. Therefore, perhaps, we should proceed cautiously. Is the history of laughter possible? We will seek the answer to this question and briefly survey the different theories of laughter that came up at different times. Finally, we will attempt to understand Rabelais's use of laughter in his *Gargantua*.

Fernand Braudel has enlarged the scope of history in this manner:

Everything is history, they say jokingly. Claude Lévi-Strauss wrote only recently: "For everything is history, what was said yesterday is history, what was said a minute ago, is history". I would amend this to whatever was said, thought, acted, or merely lived...History is a dialectic of the time span; through it, and thanks to it, history is a study of society, of the whole society, and thus of the past, and thus equally of the present, past and present being inseparable. In a remark he repeated again and again during the last ten years of his life, Lucien Febvre put it this way: "History, science of the past, science of the present." (68-69)

It was Mikhail Bakhtin who seriously proposed a history of laughter in connection with his discussion of Rabelais.<sup>1</sup> The oldest theory of laughter believed in, in Rabelais's time was that of Aristotle as stated in his *De anima*: "Of all living creatures only man is endowed with laughter." In his introductory poem to *Gargantua*, Rabelais faithfully reproduced this idea:

'Tis better far of Mirth than Tears to write,  
For Laughter is the special Gift to Man. (3)

Bergson also thought that language attains laughable results because it is a human product:

The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, the ever changing and the living, absent-mindedness in contrast with attention, in a word, automatism in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct. (129-30)

The classic biological definition of laughter is that given by Darwin:

If the mind is strongly excited by pleasurable feelings, and any little unexpected event or thought occurs, then, as Mr. Herbert Spencer remarks, "a large amount of nervous energy instead of being allowed to expand itself in producing an equivalent amount

of new thoughts and emotions which were nascent is suddenly checked in its flow...the excess must discharge itself in some other direction, and there results an efflux through the motor nerves to various classes of the muscles...producing the half-convulsive actions we call laughter." (198)

Hobbes's theory locates the comic in a psychological attitude of self-feeling. "Laughter", says Hobbes, is a "sudden glory arising from some sudden conception of some eminency in ourselves by comparison with the infirmity of others, or with our own formerly." (Swabey 212)

In opposition to the psychological superiority theory, Kant<sup>2</sup> pointed out the intellectual origin of the comic in "something absurd" and that it was "excited by ideas", accepting (as Schopenhauer<sup>3</sup> did later), an incongruity theory. In her book *Comic Laughter: A Philosophical Essay* Marie Collins Swabey contends that Kant was right in maintaining that laughter conveys a sense of health or bodily well-being but he is wrong in believing that nothing is gained in this realization of incongruity:

Surely Kant is wrong in holding that nothing is gained or thought in the perception of the incongruous, since at the very least there is negative learning, the discovery of what is finally excluded as contradictory from the structure of things; while on the positive side our acquaintance is enriched with regard to the possibilities of actuality. (10)

It is therefore possible to have a philosophical theory of laughter that differs from the biological view of laughter as a release of suppressed energy, a reversion to infantilism or as an expression of basic organic drives. It stands in contrast, also, to the sociological view of laughter as a means of social control to punish non-conformists. It is also different from the psychological accounts, which find in merriment an outlet for frustration, aggression, liberation of the libido or the unconscious mind. We find the formulation of such a philosophical theory in Swabey:

Metaphysically, we would suggest, the very pre-supposition of the possibility of taking an impartial, objective attitude in judging the ludicrous involves an ontological argument as to the genuineness of the universe as a rational structure - by a re-affirmation in denial similar to that used by Descartes and others to prove the reality of the truth and of the self. For to maintain that the comic judgement has objective insight into the irrelevant requires assuming the logical integrity of the universe in which thought has the cogency to show forth such irrelevance with relevance. (12)

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Rabelais's use of the comic, though steeped in tradition, is yet open to new interpretations. Bakhtin's study of Carnival and Menippean satire in his book on Rabelais is unique in so far as it makes a political statement. The carnivalesque spirit in Bakhtin is subversively political, giving voice to the chorus of people who laugh at official forms. Julia Kristeva, on the other hand, by conflating Bakhtin's idea of "dialogism" and "polyphony" with that of the "carnivalesque" created a new distinction between prose narratives of polysemic, dialogical themes and the narrative development of single, monological meaning.<sup>4</sup> Politico-cultural contexts are then irrelevant: carnivalism becomes an intratextual phenomenon – and hence for Kristeva always also intertextual.<sup>5</sup>

Laurent Joubert, a member of the Montpellier Medical School where Rabelais studied and later taught, published in 1560 *A Treatise on Laughter, containing its essence, causes and wondrous effects curiously studied, discussed and observed by M. Laur. Joubert*. In 1579 he published another treatise in Paris, entitled *The moral cause of laughter of the eminent and very famous Democritus explained and witnessed by the divine Hippocrates in his epistles*. (Bakhtin 68) Though these treatises were published after Rabelais's death, Bakhtin believes that they echo the thoughts current at Montpellier in Rabelais's time. According to Bakhtin, the comic had a serious implication and relevance in the Renaissance that was later lost:

The Renaissance concept of laughter can be roughly described as follows: Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness. Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter. (66)

The didactic and moral point of view is foremost in Rabelais's idea of comedy. At the very outset in the 'Prologue', he compares his text to the *sileni*, which were little boxes in medicine shops painted on the outside with wanton figures like harpies, satyrs etc., but containing within them, useful and beneficial drugs:

Therefore it is that you must open the Book and carefully weigh what is treated therein. Then shall you find that the Drug contained within is of far higher Value than the Box promised; that is to say, that the Matters treated on here are not much Buffoonery as the Title without shewed forth. (8)

Taking this cue from Rabelais, we can now look at some passages from *Gargantua*. In Chapter V, 'The Chit-Chat of the Drinkers', Rabelais presents the speech of a drinker justifying his drinking, the occasion being a post-dinner drinking session before the impending birth of Gargantua:

Then they fell to Dessert in the same Spot: and forthwith began Flagons to go, Gammons to trot, Goblets to fly, Glasses to rattle:

Draw, reach, fill, mix – Give it to me – without Water; so, my Friend...By the Belly of St. Quenot let's talk of drinking – I only drink at my *Hours*, like the Pope's Mule. – I only drink in my Breviary like a good Father Guardian. – Which was first, Thirst or Drinking? – THIRST, for who would have drunk without Thirst in the time of Innocence?...We poor innocents drink only too much without Thirst. – Not I, truly, as I am a Sinner, without Thirst, if not present, at least Thirst to come, preventing it, you understand. I drink for the Thirst to come. I drink for ever and ever. My Eternity is in drinking, and my Drinking in Eternity. (32-33)

The drinker here speaks like a scholastic, quoting from Aristotle and Horace and presents pseudo problems like the query whether an egg existed first or a hen alluding to Macrobius and Plutarch. There is a dig at the Mendicant orders who invented cups shaped like Breviaries for drinking on the sly.

Images taken from the human anatomy abound in Rabelais in full measure as this is one way of achieving the diminution of man to his creaturely level – a strong tendency that ran concurrently during the Renaissance and the Reformation with that of glorification of man in the Renaissance philosophy of man. Rabelais describes the strange fashion of Gargantua's birth through the ear of his mother in anatomical detail. Gargamelle had eaten too much of tripe as a result of which her fundament had slipped out:

Whereupon a Filthy old Hag of the Company, who had the Reputation to be a great Physician...made her so horrible an Astringent that all her Membranes were so stopped and constricted that you could very hardly have enlarged them with your Teeth (which is a thing very horrible to think of), in the same way as the Devil at a Mass of St. Martin, copying down the Tittle-tattle of two Wenches, lengthened out his Parchment by tugging with his Teeth.

By this Mishap, the Cotyledons of the Matrix were all loosened above, and by these the child leaped up and entered into the *vena cava*, and clambering by the Diaphragm right above her Shoulders,

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where the said Vein parts in two, took his Way to the left and issued forth by her left Ear.

As soon as he was born, he did not cry, as other Children do, *Mies, mies, mies!* But with a sturdy Voice bawled out *Drink, drink, drink!* as though inviting all the World to drink, so loud that he was heard by all the Country of Beusse and Bibaroys. (40-41)

In a true parody of myth and romance, Rabelais's hero is born in an unnatural way and the birth is described in anatomical terms borrowed from Galen. His bacchic cry for drink immediately after his birth is in consonance with the carnivalesque world he inhabits.

In Chapter VIII, 'How they apparelled Gargantua', Rabelais describes Gargantua's cod-piece with great zest. The cod-piece presents the phallic symbol of generation as also the cornucopia, the mythological horn of plenty, the story of which was narrated by Erasmus in his *Adagia*:

For his Cod-piece were used sixteen Ells and a quarter of the same Cloth, and the Form of it was as that of a bowed Arch most gallantly fastened with two fine gold Buckles that were held by two Clasps of Enamel, in each of which was set a huge Emerald of the size of an Orange. For as Orpheus says *libro di Lapidibus*, and Pliny *libro ultimo*, it hath an erectile Virtue and a strengthening of the natural Member.

The outlet of the Cod-piece was of the length of a Rod, pinked like the Hose, with the blue Damask puffing it out as before.

But on looking at the fine Embroidery of the needlework Purl and the curious Inter-tissue of Gold-work set off with rich Diamonds, precious Rubies, fine Turquoises, costly Emeralds and Persian Pearls, you would have compared it to a fair Horn of Abundance, such as you see on ancient Monuments, and such as Rhea gave to the two nymphs Adrastea and Ida, Nurses of Jupiter. Ever was it gallant, succulent, moist, ever verdant, ever flourishing, ever fructifying, full of Juices, full of Flowers, full of Fruits, full of all Delights. I answer for it to Heaven, if it did not do one good to see it. But I will set forth to you much more concerning it in the Book that I have made *On the Dignity of Cod-pieces*. (47-48)

In Chapter XIV 'How Gargantua was instructed in Latin by a Sophist', Rabelais, like Erasmus in his *Praise of Folly*, ridicules the theologians and their scholastic method of education.

Accordingly they assigned to him a great Doctor Sophist named Thubal Holofernes, who taught him his Alphabet so well that he said it by Heart backwards, and he was about it five Years and three Months.

Then he read to him Donatus, Facetus, Theodolet and Alanus *in Parabolis*, and about this he was thirteen Years six Months and two Weeks. (82)



Master Thubal Holophernes, 'a great doctor in theology'  
Illustration by Albert Dubout (20th Century)

The list of scholastic books goes on and Gargantua's tardy progress is an indictment of the system. In Chapters XXV and XXVI, Rabelais represents allegorically through the war between the cake-bakers of Lerné (Picrochole's men) and the shepherds of Grandgousier, the law-suit over fishing rights on the rivers Loire and Vienne between his father Antoine and a certain Sainte Marthe. The apparent object of this is to show the frivolous causes, which may be the origin of cruel and devastating wars and the foolish ambitions that promote them. Rabelais draws on his reading of Greek, Latin and later writers to illustrate this, and thus to reinforce the moral insisted on by Erasmus that a prince should never enter upon war until it is absolutely necessary, but once he has been forced to take it up, he should prosecute it with all his vigour and bring it to a close as quickly as possible. In Chapter XXVII Friar John, a tipsy monk, saves the close of an Abbey from being sacked by Picrochole's men in this fashion:

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Thus he set forth in a fine Cassock, put his Frock scarf-wise, and with his Staff of the Cross laid about him lustily on his Enemies, who without Order or Ensign, Trumpet or Drum, were gathering Grapes in the Vineyard;...everyone was in Disorder – he fell upon them, I say, so stiffly without giving Warning that he overthrew them like Hogs, striking all at random in the old Fencing-fashion.

For some, he beat out their Brains, for others he broke their Arms and Legs; for others he disjointed the Bones of their Neck; for others, he demolished their Kidneys, slit their Nose, blackened their Eyes, gashed their Jaws, knocked their Teeth down their Throat, shattered their Shoulder-blades, mortified their Shanks, dislocated their Thigh-bones, disabled their Fore-arms. (154-55)



Albert Dubout: The Exploits of Brother Jean protecting the clos of the Abbey  
After this absurd description of massacre, what follows is even more ridiculous:

Some died without speaking, others spoke without dying; some died speaking, others spoke dying. Others cried with a loud Voice:

“Confession! Confession! *Confiteor. Miserere. In manus.*”

So great was the Outcry of the wounded that the Prior of the Abbey with all his monks came forth; who when they saw the poor wretches thus overthrown among the Vines and wounded to Death, confessed some of them.

But while the Priests were busied with confessing them, the little Monklings ran to the Place where Friar John was, and asked him wherein he wished they should help him. To this he replied that they should cut the throats of those who were thrown down on the Earth. (157)

The ambition of the war-monger imperialist is ridiculed in Chapter XXXIII where Picrochole's ambition is being fanned by his flatterers. The copious and hyperbolic description of the success of Picrochole's army is self-deflating:

“But”, said he, “all this time what is being done by that Part of our Army which discomfited the swill-pot Clown Grandgousier?”

“They are not idle,” said they; “we shall soon meet them. They have taken for you Brittany, Normandy, Flanders, Hainault, Brabant, Artois, Holland and Zealand. They have crossed the Rhine over the Bellies of the Switzers and Lansknechts, and part of them have subdued Luxembourg, Lorraine, Champaigne, Savoye as far as Lyons, in which Place they have found your Garrisons returning from the naval Conquests in the Mediterranean Sea; and they have reassembled in Bohemia, after having sacked Suevia, Würtemberg, Bavaria, Austria, Moravia and Styria; then they have together fiercely set upon Lübeck, Norway, Sweden, Riga, Dacia, Gothia, Greenland and the Easterlings, as far as the Frozen Sea. This done, they have conquered the Isles of Orkney and subjugated Scotland, England and Ireland. From there, sailing through the Sandy Sea and by the Sarmatians, they have conquered and dominated Prussia, Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Wallachia, Trans-Silvania and Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey, and are now at Constantinople.

“Let us go, “ said Picrochole, “and betake ourselves to them as soon as possible, for I wish also to be the Emperor of Trebizon. Shall we not kill all those Dogs of Turks and Mahometans?” (177)



Dubout: Picrochole entered in a furious rage

In Chapter XXXVII Rabelais describes a Gargantuan feast that is almost a complete description of the game found near the Forest of Chimon which was Rabelais's home district. In the following chapter we have the hilarious story of 'How Gargantua ate Six Pilgrims in a Salad!' The pilgrims, for fear of the enemy, had hidden themselves in the garden between the cabbages and the lettuces. Gargantua, wanting to have some salad of lettuce, inadvertently carried off the six pilgrims:

As he was washing them first at the Fountain, the Pilgrims said to one another in a low Voice: "What shall we do? We are being drowned here amongst these Lettuces. Shall we speak? But if we speak he will kill us for Spies.

And as they were thus deliberating, Gargantua put them with his Lettuces on to a Dish of the House, as large as the Tun at Cisteaux, and with Oil, Vinegar and Salt ate them to refresh himself before Supper, and he had already swallowed five of the Pilgrims.

The sixth was still on the Dish, hidden under a Lettuce, all except his Pilgrim's Staff, which appeared above. Seeing this,

Grandgousier said to Gargantua: "I think that is the Horn of a Snail there; do not eat it."

"Why not" said Gargantua, "They are good all this Month." And drawing up the Staff, he took up his Pilgrim withal and ate him very easily; then he drank a horrible Draught of strong Wine, waiting till the Supper was served.

The Pilgrims, thus devoured, kept themselves from the Grinders of his Teeth as best they could, and thought they had been thrust in some deep Dungeon of the Prison; and when Gargantua drank the great Draught, they thought to have been drowned in his Mouth, and the Torrent of Wine nearly carried them into the Gulf of his Stomach. Nevertheless, skipping with their Staves, as do Saint Michael's Palmers, they put themselves in shelter under the Bank of his Teeth. (193-94)



Dubout: The dinner in Gargantua's stomach

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In Chapter XL, 'Why Monks are Shunned by the World, and why some have bigger Noses than others', Monks are bitterly ridiculed in the true Erasmian fashion. As Gargantua and the rest are feasting with Friar John and enjoying his company, one of them wonders why monks are shunned by the world:

To this answered Gargantua: "There is nothing so true as that the Frock and the Cowl draw on themselves the Opprobrium, Insults and Maledictions of the World, just as the Wind called Caecias attracts the clouds.

"The absolute Reason is because they eat up the Offscouring of the World, that is to say the Sins, and as Scavengers, men cast them into their Retreats, that is their Convents and Abbeys, separated from civil Conversation, as are the Retreats of a House.

"But if you can conceive why an Ape in a Family is always mocked and teased, you will understand why the Monks are shunned by all, old and young alike.

"The Ape doth not guard the House as doth a Dog, he doth not draw the Plough like an Ox; he produceth no Milk, nor Wool as doth the Sheep; he carrieth no Burdens as doth the Horse. That which he doth is to bemire and spoil everything, which is the Reason why he gets from everyone Gibings and Bastinadoes.

"In like manner a Monk – I mean one of those lazy Monks – doth not labour like the Peasant, nor guard the land as doth the Man-at-arms, nor heal the sick like the Physician, nor Preach and instruct the World like the good Evangelical Doctor and Preceptor, nor import Commodities and Things necessary for the State like the Merchant. This is the Reason why they are hooted at and abhorred by all." (203-4)

Having spoken of the vices of the monks, Rabelais draws his Utopia in his conception of the Abbey of Thelema:

All their Life was laid out, not by Laws, Statutes, or Rules, but according to their Will and free Pleasure. They rose from their Bed when it seemed good to them, they drank, ate, worked, slept when the Desire came upon them. None did awake them, none did constrain them either to drink or to eat or to do anything else whatsoever; for so had Gargantua established it.

In their Rule there was but this Clause:

DO WHAT THOU WILT,

because that Men who are free, well-born, conversant in honest Company, have by nature an Instinct and Spur, which always prompteth them to virtuous Actions and withdraweth them from Vice; and this they style Honour. (266)

Much of *Gargantua* is intelligible as a story in its own right. It deals with the central issues of education, governance, war, church-polity, religion, women, reform, monasticism, history, geography, botany, medicine, law and many others. In the true Renaissance fashion, the story can be interpreted allegorically, autobiographically, politically and in moral terms. It can be interpreted with the help of Ciceronian rhetoric; it can be seen as a generic mix of ballad, broadsheet, folk culture, epic, romance, farce and history. We have tried to argue that for Rabelais laughter is not a mere means – its cathartic and educative value is fully recognized by him – comedy, parody, paradox and satire – he has used them all. As a true cornucopian text, *Gargantua* never exhausts possibilities of interpretation. But over and above all these layers of meanings embedded in a crust of scatological, vulgar and occasionally obscene representations, we hear a surplus of meaning in the chuckle of this erudite author – that excess is the ontological absurdity emanating from the slightly widening lips of this new Democritus of the French Renaissance. Laughter as a philosophy takes a sympathetic view of man's endless toil in love and living, war and death, birth and boisterousness and teaches us the relevance of all this enterprise. That is why laughter is a serious matter and Rabelais is worth reading.

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# The Paradigm of the Renaissance as viewed in Nineteenth Century France\*

*Sudeshna Chakravarti*

The paradigm of the Renaissance is the topic of our discussion here. The question that must be asked is which Renaissance is meant. The Carolingian Renaissance might most truly deserve that name, since it marked the awakening of the Renaissance in much of Europe

...a change in ideas, followed at a distance and more haltingly in conduct, took place among the feudal society of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The knight became chivalrous. Courtesy and fair play, protection of women and the weak, were added to the ideal knightly virtues. The dubious amour *courtois* exercised a dominating influence! (Short, *The Cambridge History of Medieval Europe* I).

It was believed that the revival of Roman laws, reforms in the state and church administration, the development of Universities as centers of learning, the growth of vernacular languages and literatures, the blossoming of the chivalric ideal, new ideas of kingship and so on, created a Renaissance.

In the modern age, we have the Irish or Celtic Renaissance in which the revival of the ancient Celtic treasures of mythology, poems, stories etc. inspired and went hand in hand with creation of world class literatures, or is the Renaissance a purely Western phenomenon. We have heard of the Islamic Renaissance or rather, several Islamic Renaissances. There is the very important and very controversial Bengal Renaissance which, as some would have it, stretched from Rammohan to Satyajit Ray. Even the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971 is claimed by some as a Renaissance, since the event was not merely political and military but a turning point in the social and cultural life of the nation.

How many Renaissances are there ? How many nations and cultures have died and been reborn, since revival implies death ? Again does one Renaissance provider a standard against which all others are to be judged ? Many have refused to recognize the Bengal Renaissance on the ground that a colonized country could not create such a phenomenon. Aurobindo Ghose, great philosopher, poet and political leader, made the interesting suggestion that the Bengal Renaissance should be rather compared to the Irish Renaissance. The

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two are closer in the time frame and India and Ireland were both colonies of the British.

The characteristics of the Renaissance or what properly constitutes a Renaissance seem equally elusive and debatable. Some points are beyond dispute : an extraordinary and prolonged outburst of creative activity in many directions, the many-sided talents of the star performers, who might be soldiers, scholars, poets, painters, musicians and mechanics, all in one (hence placing Satyajit in this category !). All the rest is subject to dispute. Was the Renaissance a wholly new phenomenon ? Numerous scholars, on the other hand, have sought the medieval roots of the Renaissance. Don Quixote tried to recreate the chivalric dreams of the Middle Ages in early seventeenth century Spain. Yet research is shown that medieval romances played a role of the Renaissance in a literary form, if not real life. What was the nature of the Italian Renaissance that could include such diametrically opposite and towering characters like Savonarola and Machiavelli ? Or was the former, as some have suggested a remnant of the Middle Ages, who raised his head during the Renaissance and was destroyed by it ?

The Renaissance has been considered, and to some extent was, a liberation of reason and rejection of superstition. But the belief in magic, cabalism, hermetism etc. are so well-known as to need no documentation. Pico distinguished between good and bad magic and there was the "School of Night" in England. There were court astrologers, just like court physicians. The Renaissance has been considered anti-Christian and a return to the classical world. Certainly there were spirits like Machiavelli, who considered Christianity as a negative force for Italy and destructive of the ancient Roman valour. Yet Popes from Martin V to Leo X accommodated themselves very well with the Renaissance and even patronized it. The Renaissance was humane and enlightened. But while Montaigne, Erasmus and others condemned witch burning, it was rampant in many parts of Europe. Was the Renaissance skeptical and open-minded ? We might again cite the example of Montaigne, who was led by extreme scepticism to blind faith by a strange logic. Since nothing was certain one might as well believe everything. The Renaissance was essentially an urban and bourgeois phenomenon. We remember a line of Browning, "What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings," The Medicis, merchant princes of Florence, great patrons of art, were considered sufficiently lofty to intermarry twice with the royal house of France. Yet in sixteenth century France, more money was spent in buying lands and offices than in commerce and industry. As a historian puts it:

... there can be no doubt about the beginnings of massive urban investment in rural property in the early sixteenth century... Like

Juvenal's Roman shopkeeper every city notary and butcher yearned for a country smallholding, even though it made him no more than the lord of a single lizard. (Salmon 43-56)

"The Spanish chronicler Andres Bernaldez attacked Jews because they never wanted to take jobs in ploughing and digging... all their wish was a job in the town, and earning their living without much labour" (Hale 195). While this might be just a piece of anti-Semitic propaganda, it shows a valorization of the countryside as opposed the idle and parasitical city. The economy of the Renaissance can be briefly described as "the best of times, worst of times", in Dickens' words. To make matters even more complex, there was the parallel great movement of the reformation, which both complemented and contradicted the Renaissance.

In such circumstances to seek a definite paradigm for the Renaissance is extremely difficult, if not impossible, beyond the barest minimum. However, the ideas and analysis of the Renaissance by certain French writers of the nineteenth century might throw light on certain aspects. In their case, understandably, the Renaissance is filtered through the Enlightenment, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Empire, as well as various theories of contemporary France.

Comte Arthur de Gobineau was a writer of novels and short stories, an expert on Central Asia and on the Cuneiform script of ancient Babylon. He is most famous or notorious for *L'Essai sur L'inégalité des Races* (Essay on the Inequality of Races), which is considered a classical text on contemporary racism and a precursor of Fascism. Gobineau was also deeply interested in the Renaissance period. Aside from *Le Prisonnier Chanceux* (The Lucky Prisoner), a historical novel, written in a light vein and set in the sixteenth century, his notable work on this topic is *Renaissance*. This book, penetrating and erudite, is somewhat unusual in format. Gobineau first offers a long general overview or analysis of the Renaissance, as an European phenomenon. Then he holds up five key figures or star performers of Renaissance Italy : Savonarola, Cesar Borgia, two Popes, Jules II and Leo X and Michel Ange. On each of these the author writes an essay or what he calls exposition, followed by a drama or perhaps better, a dramatic dialogue. There were other historical personages, Machiavelli, Raphael, Titian and outside Italy, King Charles VIII of France and the diplomat-historian Philippe de Comines. Probably Gobineau drew on Vasari's *Lives of Painters* for some of the biographical material. His aim was to present the mélange of art, politics and all the rest that made up the Renaissance. Cesar, he reminds us, was a general, political leader and engineer, interested also in painting, sculpture, music and architecture.

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Lucrece Borgia appears as the feminine face of the Renaissance, Gobineau tells us that the lot of women in Renaissance Italy was far from enviable. They lived in a harem like seclusion. There were tragic outcomes as in the case of Francesca di Rimini, so movingly related by Dante or comic ones that appear in *Decameron*. Lucrece is seen as a woman in the highest circle of Renaissance Italy, who lost her personal happiness but played a role in politics. Incidentally she appears as the heroine in a play of Victor Hugo, named after her.

What was Gobineau's image of the Renaissance man ? A modern editor of his book puts it in this way :

The central theme of the Renaissance it is the exaltation of the individualism, it is, following Carlyle and Emerson, the cult of heroes, of representative men, it will be before, Nietzsche, the apology for the superman (Gobineau, *La Renaissance, Sciences Historiques* xxvi)

The paradigm or origin of the Renaissance that Gobineau puts forward (he seems to include the Renaissance, the Reformation, peasant was the popular rebellions from the Hussites onward in his sweep) is briefly as follows. In the middle ages, the peasants prospered under the protection of the castle i.e. the feudal lord and the spiritual guidance of the abbey i.e., the Catholic Church. So did the urban bourgeoisie. It was precisely for this reason that they wanted a change. Only relatively well off people rebel. Those who are at the very bottom remain passive and apathetic in their misery or try to run away. While conditions were ripe for rebellion, the Church had become increasingly corrupt. There did not appear much chance of reform from within. The sum total brought chaos and violence in many Italian city states, where the merchants had become gentlemen. Only Venice preserved the "glory and peace" of her citizens by imposing a sort of benevolent oligarchy.

Gobineau's explanation of the Renaissance, right or wrong strikingly resemble the thesis presented by Alexis de Tocqueville, the great historian and sociologist of nineteenth century France in his *L'Ancien Régime et La Révolution en France* (The Ancient Regime and the Revolution in France) Tocqueville maintains that the revolution took place in France rather than elsewhere not because the French people were worse off than their counterparts in the neighbouring countries but for the opposite reason. Those who have made some advances wish to go further. In the language of modern sociology, it was the revolution of rising expectations.

Another feature of the Renaissance was the coming together of different parts of Europe the cultural to some extent political blending even if the means of achieving the were not always excessively pleasant. Why did foreign

powers and princes continuously invade Italy ? After all they had enough on their place already. It was not simply ambition, love of plunder or historical excuses. (Gobineau makes the King of France claim Florence, on the ground that his ancestor had helped to found it. ) The invaders and looters were driven by a little understood but inexorable law of history, perhaps the Hegelian *Zeitgeist*, Time Spirit.

...it is no less true that the future of intellectual development of the world demanded general coming together and this in fact took place not because Italy was forced to give this or that of her parts to all the foreigners who wished to cut her into pieces, but because each inoculated into her something of its genius... Mysterious laws which, at certain moments, influence the development of humanity. (Ibid 224)

We are reminded of *Le Tableau de la France* where Michelet shows how the ages and historical events including even the disaster (from the French point of view) of Waterloo helped to bring together the different parts of France, which leaving on each part some mark of neighbouring foreign country.

Did the Renaissance mark a revival of classical learning and ideas ? Gobineau maintained that the renaissance rather raised the question of revival, the difference between the past and the present. The middle ages were hardly aware of such a difference and did not believe that anything had died and needed to be revived “The feudal world sincerely believed that it was the continuation pure and simple of what had preceded it.” (Ibid 15)

Perhaps Western Europe belonged more to Rome while the Byzantine Empire gave preference to Greece but the sense of continuity was there. The princes considered themselves the heirs of the ancient republics and the Ceasars. The twelve peers of Charlemagne or the Knights of Arthur were placed beside the heroes of classical mythology. Achilles or Hercules. Guinevere and Iseult were sisters of Helen of Troy. Such a view would recall *Der Zauberberg* (The Magic Mountain) by Thomas Mann. In the closed claustrophobic world of the sanatorium, the patients are always disputing and debating with each other, particularly the freethinking, liberal Settembrini and the conservative Naphta, Settembrini, for example accuses the Catholic Middle Ages of ignoring Virgil. Naphta retorts that medieval Christianity paid the ancient poet the greatest compliment possible, elevating him to the role of a proto Christian saint.

Gobineau sees the Renaissance leadership divided, as almost always happens in times of crisis, between three main parties the two extreme sides and the moderates in between: “In the fifteenth century, as in all climacteric epochs the adversaries of the present gathered under three banners.” (Ibid 17)

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There were the extreme classicists who wanted to cancel all that had taken place since the fall of the Roman Empire. It is difficult to say who such men were in real life, though Machiavelli as we have seen seemed regret that Christianity had replaced the Roman deities and softened the ancient Roman spirit. Then there were the extreme spirits of the Reformation, who wanted to recreate the first era of Christianity. "There men turned their glances towards the primitive church" (Ibid) Matthew Arnold and others have seen Hellenism and Hebraism as the two basic elements that made up Western civilization. Instead of the ongoing synthesis, now there were tremendous pulls in opposite directions. There were moderates who wanted to take in the best elements of all ages to carry out reforms without rocking the boat. But perhaps because they were moderates, they lacked the power to make themselves heard or to inspire a following. What would have happened of men like Erasmus had poisoned the fierce, single – minded determination of Savonarola or Calvin?

If his usual way, Gobineau sees the overall influence of the Renaissance on all walks of life.

Antiquity which had already turned the heads of politicians and theologians the scholars philosophers, poet became even more the sovereignty of sculptors and painters. (Ibid)

Italy was the extreme case for the classical spirit had always remained strong there beneath a veneer of Christianity. "Italy was hardly Christian and had hardly been very much so". (Ibid 24) The nymphs even in the middle ages had served as models for pictures of saints, Rienzi had tried to revive the Roman republic in the heart of medieval Catholic Europe. But Italy also had experienced Christianity of a particular kind; bouts of millenarian rebellion and Savonarola was perhaps in heir to this tradition.

Gobineau makes a rather strange connection between the discovery, hardly a peaceful discovery, of the New World and some of the violence and ambition that had been unleashed in Renaissance Italy. The condottiers were apparently inspired by the example of the conquistadors. Cesar Borgia in Central Italy probably considered himself the counterpart of Cortez in Mexico. In fact, the conquest of Mexico took place more than a decade after the death of Cesar Borgia. An interesting parallel appears in a twentieth century French play, *Le Terre est Ronde* (The World is Round) by Salacrou, which links the new world , or rather the dream of it, with the Italy of Savonarola. It is a dream that Gobineau paints with extraordinary brilliance and poetry.

Every thing that came from the strange countries whose singularities were exaggerated were made to rouse the already excited imagination of man ... (things) of new colour and shape,

green birch, monkeys, delicate and bizarre works made with pens whose colour and nuances were extremely unexpected and, above all a lot of gold, silver and precious stones. (*Ibid* 133)

Renan was above all, a historian of social and philosophical thought. His seven-volume work tracing the origin of Christianity begins with the *Life of Jesus*, his most famous book, and ends with the *Life of Marcus Aurelius*. In a similar vein in his Leaders of Christian and anti-Christian thought". This collection includes essays on Galileo and Calvin, Renan also wrote a life of Martin Luther. Somewhat like Gobineau, though from a different angle he collates the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter Reformation, seeking the medieval roots of each, in a positive or negative way.

Renan sees the trial of Galileo as one of the deceive moments of human history. Here the new age faced the worst elements of what had preceded it. "It was at this moment that scholastic science (a silly compound of the Bible and Aristotle, misrepresenting both) found itself confronted with exact science, proving itself by itself". On the other had, in the Calvin essay he indicates that the Counter Reformation had imbibed chivalric romance, one of the best fruits of the European Middle Ages. For example, Loyola drew inspiration from the romance Amadis. Renan implies that Calvin was perhaps incomplete because he lacked this element.

In his history of human thought, Renan points out the path of synthesis. Perhaps the future would include both Jesus and Marcus Aurelius. Similarly the Renaissance incorporating the best parts of the Middle Ages and rejecting the dross might pave the path for the coming generations. Interestingly, Renan places the Renaissance reformation era between the past and the future, comparing it to the French Revolution, another epoch making and violent event.

Jules Michelet was one of the greatest literary and intellectual figures of nineteenth century France. His several volume history of France, history of the French Revolution, Roman history, a life of Jeanne d' Arc as well as other works of a quite different kind reflect the depths of his scholarship and versatility. Michelet was notable for bringing his views on the present to bear on the past. How did he portray the Renaissance?

Michelet had been influenced by the eighteenth century Italian philosopher Vico and his cyclical theory of history Michelet, however, sees history as a kind of game of snakes and ladders, progress and regression in turn. He believed that "Humankind comes closer every day to the solution of the problem." (*Tableau de la France* 93)

That is the problem of poverty, inequality, social discord etc. The Roman Empire, Christianity, Charlemagne, the Crusades the Renaissance and the French Revolution as well as later developments. But all ages are not equal in value. In the words of a critic:

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What Michelet really admires are not virtues which the chivalrous and Christian centuries cultivated but the heroisms of the scientist and the artist, the Protestant religion and politics the politics the efforts of man to understand his situation and rationally to control his development. Throughout the middle ages, Michelet is impatient for the Renaissance.

This indeed, is what the Renaissance meant in Michelet's historical scheme.

The early centuries of comparative barbarism succeed one another fast they lead up to modern nationalism. Jeanne d' Arc a brief lapse then a great national movement of enlightenment and independence – the Renaissance, the reformation – causes the story to overflow its frame (or more accurately, Italy and Germany to overflow into the frame); then the Renaissance lapses, the pace slows down....we see...the development of a new Renaissance, which has its climax in the revolution. (Ibid 39)

In his essays on Martin Luther and the Jesuits, Michelet to some extent conflates the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter reformation as do Gobineau and Renan. The Renaissance<sup>4</sup> was part of what Michelet considered the “Bible of humanity” what a critic calls his “sensibility love for the humble people....anger against gold” (*Pages de Litterature Française* 991) likewise appear in his approach to the Renaissance.

Another aspect of the nineteenth century French attitude to the Renaissance was a certain stress on race and nationality. Renan finds a Celtic or Breton element in the development of the cult of chivalry and courtly love in the middle ages, in the legends of King Arthur and the round table, and a supernatural that is neither divine nor diabolic. It is precisely this element which the renaissance, from Ariosto to Shakespeare, has imbibed.

There remains the marvelous purely nationalist nature taking interest in action and becoming itself an actor the great mystery of fatality unfolding through the secret conspiracy of all the beings as in Shakespeare and Ariosto. It would be interesting to do research in what was Celtic in the first of these poets; as for Ariosto he is the Breton poet par excellence. (Ibid 1018)

For Taine with his positivist philosophy the English Renaissance and particularly Shakespeare – Taine is one of the best Shakespeare critics – appear as a particular moment in the evolution of the national spirit. In the words of a critic.

Literary works are, for Taine, manifestations of the ways of feeling and thinking of a race at a certain moment in a certain

milieu. It is thus that he studies Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Byron, representative types of the English genius in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Ibid 925)

The Renaissance paradigm or paradigms outlined by the best studies and though of the nineteenth century France throw light on both the subject and object of the analysis.

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(All translations are from the original French Texts by the author)

## Manifestations of Violence in Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Two Trains Running*

*Neela Sarkar*

Violence is endemic to Wilson's dramaturgy. In all his ten plays there is an undercurrent of violence. At times it is simmering just beneath the surface waiting to erupt while at other times it erupts in violent rage. Often this violence is aimed at others and sometimes it is directed at oneself. The W.H.O describes violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation. Susan Opotow, in her article points out that violence may take direct and structural forms. (*Aggression and Violence* 205). Direct violence is concrete and committed by and on particular people, such as assault, drive by shooting, torture and war. In contrast, structural violence is gradual, imperceptible and diffused in society. It occurs when basic resources needed for human wellbeing and dignity are distributed unfairly. Citing Gatlung, Opotow explains that sub-poverty wages and dangerous substandard housing are symptoms of violence when some the 'topdogs' get much more out of the interaction in the structure than others, the 'underdogs' (Ibid).

Because structural violence can be imperceptible and its agency diffused, victims of structural violence often contribute to their debilitation. All Wilson's characters are African Americans situated in the twentieth century and as such are victims of structural violence. They bear testimony to the blighting effect of slavery and racial discrimination. Here I would like to establish that because African Americans have been victims of this structural violence they are often involved in acts of direct violence. For my purpose I shall examine two plays by Wilson, *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* and *Two Trains Running* since these two plays show two completely different manifestations of violence.

August Wilson shot to fame with *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, in 1984. The play is set in a Chicago recording studio, it is March 1927 and the four members of Ma's band are waiting for her to arrive so that they may start recording for the White owned music company. Although the play is based on the real life legendary blues singer, Gertrude Pridgett, who during the mid 1920s had a large appreciative African American audience, the focus is more on the four musicians and Ma Rainey appears only half way through in Act 1.

The play opens with Ma's band of musicians Cutler, Toledo, Slow Drag and Levee waiting in the band room in the basement and whiling away the

time exchanging stories of their past. Levee is the youngest and the most ambitious of the group. He is also the most belligerent although we soon realize that it is not without reason. While all the band members have encountered racism in some form or the other, Levee's experience has been especially horrific. He recounts how when he was just eight years old he had seen his mother being gang raped- "eight or nine" white men had entered the house and grabbed his mother, "just like you take hold of a mule and make him do anything you want." (MR 57) He goes on to narrate how in order to save his mother he had tried to "cut one of them's throat!"(MR 57) His efforts had been in vain because the man had grabbed hold of that knife and slashed him across the chest with it, leaving an ugly scar. The scar is a constant reminder of his humiliation and helplessness. After the above incident he recounts how his father had waited for the right moment and settled the score with four of the attackers till they "caught up with him, and hung him and set him afire." (MR 58) While the above experience could be reason enough for his aggression and restlessness Wilson seems to suggest that there are other reasons.

Levee has a version of the music he wants to record, but the band won't allow it. Certainly Ma Rainey will not allow her most popular song *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*, to be tampered with. She firmly tells her white producer, Irvin when he tries to back Levee, "Levee ain't messing up my song. If he got what people want let him take it somewhere else, I'm singing Ma Rainey's song. I ain't singing Levee's song." (MR 51) It is a historical fact that as more and more African Americans moved northwards after World War II, blues music travelled with them and different styles emerged. By showcasing an individual style, Levee intends to overcome the stigma of belonging to the backward sharecropping south. When Muddy Waters came to Chicago in 1940, his sister warned him, "They don't listen to that kind of old blues you're doing now... not in Chicago" (*Deep Blues* 135). Levee's words sound familiar "The people up North ain't gonna buy all that tent show nonsense" he says of Ma Rainey's kind of music, "they wanna hear some music", meaning his kind of music. (MR 65)

One of the major issues of the play is the need to preserve one's culture. In this context Ma Rainey's determination to sing her own song may be looked upon as her way of preserving her culture, she becomes a repository of her African heritage and her blues becomes as Moyers puts it "the cultural response of blacks in America to the situation they find themselves in." (*A World of Ideas* 168). Seen in this light Levee's desire to go against tradition is an act of disruption. Anxious to distance himself from what he considers a shameful past he tells Toledo, "You don't see me running around in no jungle with no bone

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between my nose." (MR 24) Levee's response is very similar to George Murchinson's, Beneathea's rich and pompous suitor in Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*. When Asagai speaks eloquently of Africa, Murchinson remarks;

Oh dear, dear, dear! Here we go! A lecture on the African past! On our great Western heritage !In one second we will hear all about the great Ashanti empires; the great Songhay civilization;and the great sculpture of Benin-and then some poetry in Bantu-and the whole monologue will end in the word *heritage* ! (Nastily) Let's face it, baby, your heritage is nothing but a bunch of raggedy spirituals and some grass huts. (*A Raisin in the Sun* 81).

Both Levee and Murchinson suffer from low self esteem because of the colour of their skins and because they consider their cultures inferior to the dominant culture.

For Wilson the matter of race is important , "I believe it is the largest most identifiable part of our personality..." (*The Ground on which I stand* 14) and he seems to suggest that Levee's fractured personality is a consequence of his denial of his past. Also linked to the matter of race is the issue of economic exploitation, another reason for Levee's frustration. Aware of his talent but unable to use it profitably he justifies his dissatisfaction,

Niggers got a right to be dissatisfied. Is you gonna be satisfied with a bone somebody done throwed you when you see them eating the whole hog. (MR 77)

Song in Wilson's dramaturgy, as Paul Carter Harrison points out is a metaphor for self authentication (*August Wilson's Blues Poetics* 309) Ma's ability to sing her song denotes that she has been successful in finding her "self" within the cultural context whereas Levees inability to record his version reflects among other things his alienation from the sustaining power of his culture. His self esteem suffers another blow when Sturdyvant, Ma's white manager agrees to buy all his music—for five dollars apiece but refuses to let him record them as he does not think they will sell as much as Ma's songs. This infuriates Levee but unable to confront the real enemy he vents his anger on Cutler, pulls a knife on him and dares "Cutler's God" to come and save him:

Cutler's God! Come and save this Nigger! Come on and save him like you did my mama!...I heard her when she called you! Heard her when she said, "Lord, have mercy! Jesus, help me!...And did you turn your back ,motherfucker? Did you turn your back? (Levee becomes so caught up in his dialogue with God that he forgets about Cutler and begins to stab upward in the air, trying to reach God) (MR83).

Motivational theories describe aggression or violence as resulting from blocked human needs. According to this theory put forward by Maslow and cited by Opotow (*Aggression and Violence* 409), human needs may be categorised as –

- a) physiological
- b) safety
- c) love
- d) esteem
- e) self-actualisation.

Failure to meet any of these needs may lead to desperate behaviour, depression and even violence.

Levee's struggle assails obstacles of race, gender and selfhood as he battles the control of a white producer and a female employer; symbols of power of the white males and of the legendary black matriarchy. The inevitable face off with Ma occurs when he plays his version of the song during Ma's recording: "I was playing it the way I feel it" he tells Ma, who in no mood to tolerate his subversion has him fired" (MR 84) Then in a bizarre turn of events he knifes Toledo for accidentally stepping on his fancy shoes.

This seemingly incomprehensible violence follows established patterns of violence. Based on their research, Lloyd and Emery point out that "physical aggression is almost always preceded by verbal aggression." The people involved in the violence engage in hostile competitive acts, "aggression ritual" that ends in violence. ("Physically Aggressive Conflict in Romantic Relationships" 24-47). Levee's altercations with Sturdyvant and his confrontation with Cutler is the "aggression ritual" that builds up to the murder of Toledo. Levee's anger begins to make sense when we take into account the multiple attacks on his manhood .Behind the immediate motivation for violence, lie years of racial oppression, powerlessness and economic deprivation. Denied a "voice" his retaliation is a confused reaction to his artistic exploitation and against Ma herself, the source of his income and a threat to his masculinity. His act of violence is an internalization of his frustration. He lashes out at someone who, like him, lacks power and is a victim of racism.

Another character in Wilson who exhibits another kind of violence is Risa of *Two Trains Running*. Risa is the waitress at Memphis' restaurant. She knows that she is good at her job – "I ain't worried about getting fired" she claims.(TT 18) Her knowledge that she is indispensable makes her flout Memphis' instructions that she is not to offer free meals to Hambone. Risa, the only woman in the play is somewhat of an enigma. She has slashed her legs with a razor, seven scars on one leg and eight on the other.

She has mutilated herself to protest against the commodification of women. Frustrated by the attitude of men who look upon her as sex object she disfigures her legs to avoid the male gaze. "That's why I did it. To make them ugly." (TT 99) Harry J. Elam says that because traditional theatre is constructed from and intended for the "male gaze", feminine theatrical criticism attempts to "deconstruct" the traditional "signs of woman" on stage. In *Two Trains*, Risa literally tries to "deconstruct" herself as woman (Elam "August Wilson's Women" 167). That her strategy is successful, is borne out by her employer's words- "A man be happy to have a woman like that except she done ruined herself..." (TT 31) By scarring herself Risa is challenging the Western standards of beauty. The West has valorized blonde, fair blue-eyed beauty and denigrated dark skin and kinky hair. Women with slim smooth legs have been objects of desire. Elam points out that among the Tiv tribe of Northern Nigeria scarification has a social and religious significance. This scarification renders women more attractive (Ibid). By scarring herself Risa is showing that she is deliberately rejecting Western standards of beauty. Hence she is reacting to the structural violence which blocks the human need for self esteem. In Risa's case, because she is a woman she is a victim of both institutionalized as well as of gender violence. Risa's scars may be read as a physical expression of psychological scars. Kim Mara observes, "white women are preferred by all men", ("Ma Rainey and the Boyz: Gender Ideology in August Wilson's Broadway Canon 131) consequently black women suffer a kind of inadequacy. Kim Mara quotes Collins, "...African American women experience the pain of never being able to live up to externally defined (white) standards of beauty-standards applied to us by white men, white women, Black men, and most painfully one another" (Ibid)

The body which has been violated, degraded, maimed or otherwise compromised has particular reference to cultures that have borne subjugation and racial discrimination. Most often the personal site of the body becomes a sign of the political fortunes of the collective culture. Seen in this light Risa's scars physicalise the injustices of slavery and continued racial and gender inequalities.

Levee's predicament is comparable to any young artist's who tries to chart a new course and while we may sympathise with him, we also realize that his anger is totally misdirected. This black on black violence results from his anger and frustration at feeling out of control. His inability to cope with pressures from within and from society is channeled into self destructive behaviour. In the case of Risa the scars are a form of resistance to the racial and patriarchal stereotyping and representation by "others". The scars she inflicts on herself is her way of defining her self, of making herself visible

in a an environment where black American women are rendered invisible. However both instances show that such self-destructive behaviours are unhealthy patterns of responding to feelings of shame and powerlessness which is born out of centuries of structural violence.

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# The Absence of Women-Characters in *The Old Man and the Sea*: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation

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Ernest Hemingway's 1952 novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*, is conspicuous by the absence of women-characters; except for the woman included in the tourist party admiring 'a great long white spine with a huge tail at the end' (Hemingway 126) of the big marlin left in the garbage to be cleared by the tide of the sea, there is no other woman-character directly presented in the text. It should be pointed out here that some Hemingway critics consider that the sea is the actual female character present in the novella, and the old man's attitude towards women is to be found in his responses to the sea.<sup>1</sup> For example, Rena Sandeson, in "Hemingway and Gender History", comments : 'For the true woman in the book is the sea itself (Swan), which, according to countless myths and legends, is a woman, the origin of life and a destroyer of life as well (Lederer 233-37; Neumann 47-48, 217-22). Santiago thinks mythically. He tells us that those who love the seas call her *La mar*. "Sometimes those who love her [the sea] say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman" (29). Santiago knows and accepts the ambivalent double nature of the mother-sea : He "always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favour" (30). In the end, *La mar* withholds Santiago's catch, but the old man (unlike Hemingway's other protagonists) blames no one else-not even the cruel mother-sea – but only himself for having gone out "too far" (120)" (Sanderson 191-192). Since the sea is largely the metaphorical representation of an archetypal mother-figure, it should not be considered as a real woman-character. I do not, however, want to undermine the importance of the role of the sea; in the later part of this paper I would analyze in detail the old man's characteristic responses to the sea in terms of his own psychic preoccupation.

The reader, however, discovers certain references to women in Hemingway's description of the past life of the old man as well as in the memory of the protagonist. In describing the old man's shack Hemingway says : 'On the brown walls of the flattened, overlapping leaves of the sturdy fibered *guano* there was a picture in color of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre. These were relics of his wife. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt.' (15-16) In an account of the oldman's dreams

and reveries Hemingway significantly comments that in his youth the old man often used to dream of the women in sleep; now he only dreams of the lions on the African shores: 'He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach.' (25) Hemingway directly renders some of such reveries of the old man at the crucial moments of the narrative. Carlos Baker and some others call attention to the importance of the lion reverie in the novella;<sup>2</sup> Baker, in particular, stresses the recurring pattern of alternation of bracing and relaxation by the two important images of the boy and the lions – the boy braces him, and the lions provide him with the necessary relaxation from the tension that grips his mind : 'They help in a very notable way. For the boy and the lions are related to one of the fundamental psychological laws of Santiago's – and indeed of human – nature: the constant wavelike operation of bracing and relaxation. The boy braces, the lions relax, as in the systolic-diastolic movement of the human heart. It is related, as a phenomenon, to the alternation of sleep and waking through the whole range of physical nature.' (Baker 309) These Hemingway critics, however, fail to note the curious substitution of the lion for women; infact no other Hemingway scholar, as far as I know, has noted this significant aspect of *The old Man and the Sea* though Hemingway's attitude to and his presentation of the women characters in *The Sun Also Rises*, *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and others have been dealt with in great detail.<sup>3</sup> This paper, therefore, critically examines in detail the significant absence of women-characters in *The old Man and the Sea* and its diverse psycho-analytic ramifications.

To decipher the marks of absence (which the absent characters stand for) naturally involves the critical consideration of Derrida's notion of "sous rature"; it should be pointed out here that Derrida has explained in different works his idea of "sous rature". In *Of Grammatology*, he examines its multi-dimensionality, namely, the origin of writing, linguistic consideration of "difference" and "differance" with regard to speech and writing, psychoanalytic importance of Language and its reproduction as well as historical, metaphysical and ontological questions connected with it. In another notable article, "Ellipsis", Derrida explicates the critical problems concerning deciphering the meaning of the book. He observes: 'The question of writing could be opened only if the book was closed. The joyous wondering of the *graphein* then became wandering without return. The opening into the text was adventure, expenditure without reserve.' (Derrida. *Writing and 'Difference'* 294). He, further, notes the impossibility of recovering the origin through reading: 'The return to the book is then the abandoning of the book; it has slipped in between

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God and God, the Book and the Book, in the neutral space of succession, in the suspense of the interval. The return, at this point, does not retake possession of something. It does not reappropriate the origin. The latter is no longer in itself. Writing, passion of the origin, must also be understood through the subjective genitive. It is the origin itself which is impassioned, passive, and past, in that it is written. Which means inscribed. The inscription of the origin is doubtless its Being-as-writing, but it is also its Being-as-inscribed in a system in which it is only function and a locus.' (Derrida. *Writing and Difference* 295-296) In *Of Grammatology* Derrida, however, explores much more widely the importance of absence from diverse perspectives than he does in "Ellipsis". Since this paper is primarily concerned only with the psycho-analytic significance of the absent women characters in *The Old Man and the Sea*, I would only refer to relevant passages in *Of Grammatology* which have some bearings.

Jacques Derrida observes at length on the significance of absent characters in the novel. In his view writing can never reproduce the object completely as it is only the verbal supplement for it, and it is only the signifier of the signifier : 'Not that the word "writing" has ceased to designate the signifier of the signifier, but it appears, strange as it may seem, that "signifier of the signifier" no longer defines accidental doubling and fallen secondary. "Signifier of the signifier" describes on the contrary the movement of language : in its origin, to be sure, but one can already respect that an origin whose structure can be expressed as "signifier of the signifier" conceals and erases itself in its own production.' (Derrida. *Of Grammatology*. 7) From this perspective it can be said that what the novel can succeed in achieving is an attempt to recapture what Derrida calls the lost plenitude or reappropriating presence : 'But the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*; if it fills a void. If it represents and makes an image, it is by the anterior default of a presence. Compensatory [suppleant] and vicarious, the supplement is an adjunct, a subaltern instance which *takes-(the)-place* [*tient-lieu*]. As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness. Somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by allowing itself to be filled through sign and proxy. The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself'. (Derrida. *Of Grammatology* 145) In other words the novel is merely a verbal supplement for the reality which has once been experienced by the characters. Derrida, further, stresses that it is the presence of absence that significantly informs the work of fiction. He shows how Rousseau in *The Confessions* tries to recapture the original memory of his own mother.

In order to elucidate Derrida's view I briefly cite two examples : Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847). In *The Sound* all the Compson brothers are heavily preoccupied with the memory of their lost/absent sister, Caddy, in their own monologues; it is the loss or absence which they bemoan or against which they express their resentment; thus, Caddy, though physically absent, is actually present in their consciousness. Psychoanalytically the desire for or obsession with Caddy springs from their need to recover the past what Derrida calls lost plenitude.

In *Wuthering Heights* we note that Catherine remains alive long after her death in the consciousness of Nelly, Linton, Heathcliff and even Mr Lockwood as well as the reader. Heathcliff in particular is so obsessed with her memory that he is almost literally haunted by her spectre. Their obsession with the dead Catherine symbolizes their attempt to recover the past. In this context Derrida's observation on time seems to be quite pertinent : 'The concepts of *present*, *past* and *future*, everything in the concepts of time and history which implies evidence of them – the metaphysical concept of time in general – cannot adequately describe the structure of the trace. And deconstructing the simplicity of presence does not amount only to accounting for the horizons of potential presence, indeed of a "dialectic" of protention and retention that one would install in the heart of the present instead of surrounding it with it. It is not a matter of complicating the structure of time while conserving its homogeneity and its fundamental successivity, by demonstrating for example that the past present and the future present constitute originarity, by dividing it, the form of the living present.' (Derrida. *Of Grammatology* 67)

The Derridian formulation is not altogether irrelevant to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, for his 1952 novella is actually a recapitulation of his deep-sea fishing experience in the gulf stream of Havana in the 30's; thus by the act of writing the novella he wanted to revivify the lost plenitude. Some Hemingway critics have called attention to the genesis of *The Old Man and the Sea*, and have shown how it developed from Hemingway's many fishing articles written in the 30's;<sup>4</sup> Arthur Waldhorn, in "The Old Man and the Sea", notes : 'Hemingway hooked his first marlin in 1932 in the waters off Havana, twenty years before *The old Man and the Sea* was published. During those years, Hemingway's enthusiasm for battling these magnificent fish never dulled. Nor did his admiration wane for the Cuban fishermen to whom the marlin was a way of life as well as a livelihood. Among the many fishing articles Hemingway wrote for *Esquire* in the thirties, one told the basic story of *The Old Man and the Sea*.' (Waldhorn 189) Waldhorn cites a fairly long excerpt from "On the Blule Water: A Gulf Stream Letter" (published in 1936), and the passage from this essay shows the outlines for the basic predicament of *The Old Man and the Sea*.<sup>5</sup>

*The Old Man and the Sea*, unlike Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, raises a critical problem : The old man is not as preoccupied with the memory of his dead wife (at least it seems) as the Compson brothers are with that of their lost sister. Hemingway's oblique reference to the photograph of the old man's dead wife and his remark throw an interesting sidelight on the psychological state of the old man: 'On the brown walls of the flattened, overlapping leaves of the sturdy fibered guano there was a picture in color of Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre. These were relics of his wife. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt.' (Hemingway 15-16) His remark, '... it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt', (Hemingway 16) significantly highlights not only the old man's loneliness but also his deliberate attempt to repress the memory of his dead wife since it is very painful to him. His obsession with the baseball match score in the newspaper or his reverie of the lions on the golden beaches of Africa indirectly reveals his psychological needs for release from the pent-up emotion of pain and bereavement; therefore, the repression of the memory of his wife is part of the old man's self-defence mechanism. Nietzsche significantly comments that forgetting has a positive function of psychic repression : 'Forgetting is no mere *vis inertiae* as the superficial imagine; it is rather an active and in the strictest sense positive faculty of repression [*Hemmungs vermögen*], that is responsible for the fact that what we experience and absorb enters our consciousness as little while we are digesting it (one might call the process "inpsychation") as does the thousand fold process, involved in physical nourishment – so-called "incorporation." To close the doors and windows of consciousness for a time; to remain undisturbed by the noise and struggle of our underworld of utility organs working with and against one another; a little quietness, a little *tabula rasa* of the consciousness, to make room for new thing, above all for the nobler functions and functionaries, for regulation, foresight, premeditation (for our organism is oligarchically directed [*oligarchisch eingerichtet*]) – that is the purpose of active forgetfulness, which is like a doorkeeper, a preserver of psychic order, repose, and etiquette: so that it will be immediately obvious how there could be no happiness, no cheerfulness, no hope, no pride, no present, without forgetfulness.' (Spivak xxxii)<sup>6</sup>

Lacan, in *Écrits · A selection*, explicates various psychoanalytic dimensions of Freud's *Beyond the pleasure Principle*; especially in "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious" he discusses the importance of pleasure and desire at great length, and notes various psycho-

analytic dimensions. He observes: 'Indeed, the Law appears to be giving the order "Jouis!", to which the subject can only reply "J'ouïs" (I hear), the *jouissance* being no more than understood.

'But it is not the Law itself that bars the subject's access to *jouissance* – rather it creates out of an almost natural barrier a barred subject. For it is pleasure that sets the limits on *jouissance*, pleasure as that which binds incoherent life together, until another, unchallengeable prohibition arises from the regulation that Freud discovered as the primary process and appropriate law of pleasure.' (Lacan 319) Derrida quotes from Freud's *Beyond the pleasure Principle* : 'Under the influence of the ego's instincts of self-preservation, the pleasure principle is replaced by the reality principle. This latter principle does not abandon the intention of ultimately obtaining pleasure, but it nevertheless demands and carries into effect the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of displeasure as a step on the long indirect road (Aufschub) to pleasure.' (Spivak xliv) If we analyze Hemingway's novella in the light of these remarks, we would find that the old man adopts a number of strategies to counter his unhappiness and misery : dream, conversation with the boy about baseball (sometimes also recollected when he is alone), emulation of Dimaggio, the great baseball player, the lions in Africa and most significantly his attempt to define his manly vigour by defying all sorts of adversity. Each of his evasive devices needs thorough discussion; but since Hemingway critics have already dwelt at length on the importance of dream, reverie and the baseball and Dimaggio I would like to focus on the last of the devices, i.e., his attempt to develop an exclusively masculine world in which the need for a woman can be eliminated.<sup>7</sup>

One of Hemingway's early collections of short stories is significantly entitled *Men without Women* where the protagonist are engaged in highly masculine pursuits such as soldiering, boxing, bullfighting and hunting. In this purely masculine world the role of the women has been either totally eliminated or extremely marginalized. In his bull fighter stories some of the bull fighters are found to be engaged in affairs with women; but it causes greater problems to their professional skill and eventually embarrasses them. In *The Sun also Rises* Romero finds himself involved in an imbroglio with Robert Cohn over Lady Ashley; but Romero's involvement with her proves to be disastrous to both of them. Lady Ashley says to Jake Barnes : "It was rather a knock his being ashamed of me. He was ashamed of me for a while, you know." (Hemingway *The Sun Also Rises* 246) However, she adds that Romero was not ashamed of her in the long run. (Hemingway *The Sun Also Rises* 246) In *The Old Man and the Sea* Hemingway presents his protagonist as an old

man so that he can be freed totally from the sexual drives that inhibit his young heroes. Arthur Waldhorn, taking cue from other Hemingway critics, categorizes Hemingway's heroes: 'As Philip Young and Earl Rovit have convincingly demonstrated, two kinds of hero inhabit Hemingway's world. Here they are called "apprentice" and "exemplar."' (Waldhorn 23) The old man is naturally placed in the second group. Hemingway's young apprentice heroes try to overcome their personal problems by wine and women; but his exemplars are not restricted by such limitation. Here a number of questions may arise : does Hemingway indulge in the sexual stereotypes and the sexual fantasization of men regarding sex and women?<sup>8</sup> Does a man need a woman only for sex ? If so why does the old man suffer from the dread of loneliness even though he is no longer troubled by sex? If we contrast the old man in *The Old Man and the Sea* with Frederick Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*, we would discern that Frederick Henry's sense of nihilism, engendered by Catherine's death and the loss of love, also possesses the universal awareness of the man's essential predicament in the universe; the old man suffers from the profound sense of loneliness which is more symbolically connected with the existentialist dread of despair. Both of them feel the need for companionship. In *The Sun Also Rises* Lady Ashley flies to Jake Barnes after her humiliation for emotional support even though Jake Barnes is probably sexually rendered impotent in the war. What Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea* suggests is that the old man seeks to repress his painful memory in order to concentrate on his power of endurance which is needed to face the adversity that he encounters during his journey.

If we analyze the old man's long train of thoughts and reveries during his journey across the sea we would appreciate better the significance of the absence of the women characters in the novella. Hemingway presents in detail the pattern of the old man's thoughts and reveries. The old man thinks about the sea, the weather, the moon, the sun and stars, the creatures of the sea (the Portuguese man of war, the flying fish, the small bird, the marlin and the sharks), the boy, his past fishing exploits, the lions of Africa, the baseball games, the great Dimaggio and other baseball players. He especially exhorts himself to be worthy of Dimaggio: 'This is the second day now that I do not know the result of juegos, he thought. But I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great Dimaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel. What is a bone spur ? he asked himself *Un espuela de hueso*. We do not have them. Can it be as painful as the spur of a fighting cock in one's heel ? I do not think I could endure that or the loss of the eye and of both eyes and continue to fight as the fighting cocks do.' (Hemingway 68) Again he wonders about Dimaggio after he has

succeeded in catching the marlin : “But I think the great Dimaggeo would be proud of me today. I had no bone spurs. But the hands and the back hurt truly.” I wonder what a bone spur is, he thought. May be we have them without knowing of it.’ (Hemingway 97)

However, the old man never allows his mind to drift to the thought about his dead wife. Hemingway sufficiently indicates the control the old man has over his thought pattern. An instance of the old man’s thought pattern may be cited here. When he is absorbed in speculation about the small bird which comes and rests on his line, the marlin gives the sudden tug to the line, and the bird flies out. The old man says that he should have paid more attention to his work than to wonder about the bird : ‘He looked around for the bird now because he would have liked him for company. The bird was gone.

‘You did not stay long, the man thought. But it is rougher where you are going until you make the shore. How did I let the fish cut me with that one quick pull he made ? I must be getting very stupid. Or perhaps I was looking at the small bird and thinking of him. Now I will pay attention to my work and then I must eat the tuna so that I will not have a failure of strength.’ (Hemingway 56) It is this firm control over his thought that enables him to repress the memory of his dead wife; as a result we know little of his wife or any other woman in his life.

Curiously the old man recollects vividly about his youthful days when he had a handgame with a negro from Cienfuegos at Casablanca; then the old man was not an old man, ‘but was Santiago El Campeón’. (Hemingway 70) This fight lasted for three days and he eventually beat the negro with a great effort : ‘Many of the bettors had asked for a draw because they had to go to work on the docks loading sacks of sugar or at the Havana Coal Company. Otherwise everyone would have wanted it to go to a finish. But he had finished it anyway and before anyone had to go to work.’ (Hemingway 70) In the return match in spring he won easily, ‘since he had broken the confidence of the negro from Cienfuegos in the first match.’ (Hemingway 70) It is quite evident from the old man’s reminiscent account of his youthful days that his age has not blurred his memory at all; therefore it is unlikely that he has forgotten about his youthful days with his wife. Why then does he omit the memory of his wife from his recollection ? We can only guess that this repression of the memory of his wife is deliberate, and it psychoanalytically highlights that since the old man knows that he is lonely in the vast sea he obviously tries to repress the memory of his wife as it would have made him quite vulnerable. In this context his thought about his wife does not fit in. All the thoughts he thinks are especially meant to bolster his strength or seek some release to lighten the mental stress; in this sense his memory about his wife

would only aggravate his loneliness and make him incapable of facing the odds.

In the traditional patriarchal hierarchy the women's role is recognized mainly in the domestic sphere; house keeping, nursing, bearing and rearing children and looking after their husbands and children are the essential jobs done by them. In *The Old Man and the Sea* Hemingway provides us with scanty information with regard to the domestic life of the old man. We only know that his wife hung 'a picture in color of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre' (Hemingway 16); but ever since her death the old man has just the bare necessities. He spreads old newspaper on his spring-bed instead of a mattress; he rolls his trousers for a pillow. He has an old blanket and a faded shirt. It is clear from such details that he has dour existence, and he cares little for his domestic comfort. The old man feels more at home at sea than in his shack; thus he has negated the role of women in his life. The old man's domestic life has set up an alternative pattern in which his bare daily needs are taken care of by a little boy rather than by a female. The boy brings food and drinks from the tavern on credit and sometimes from his own house. He also nurses the old man.

Carlos Baker and others have noted the role of the boy in the novella.<sup>9</sup> The boy has performed the roles of various kinds, and his relationship to the old man is that of a father and a son, a husband and a wife, a mentor and a disciple. Baker comments : 'The love of Manolo for Santiago is that of a disciple for a master in the arts of fishing; it is also the love of a son for an adopted father.' (Baker 307) Baker, by juxtaposing the boy with the lions, discovers a symbolic pattern insofar as the old man's psychological responses are concerned. He says: 'They help in a very notable way. For the boy and the lions are related to one of the fundamental psychological Laws of Santiago's – and indeed of human – nature : the constant wavelike operation of bracing and relaxation. The boy braces, the lions relax, as in the systolic-diastolic movement of the human heart.' (Baker 309) Furthermore, he stresses that the boy serves for the old man as an image of his own youth.<sup>10</sup> Bickford Sylvester, in "The Cuban Context of *The Old Man and the Sea*," particularly develops the initiation theme in connection with the role of the boy in the novella, and discovers socio-economic and mythic significance of the boy; but his observation on the deeper structural relationship between the boy and the old man is worth noting: 'In seeing Manolin as an early adolescent we have been deeply satisfied – but by what amounts to a paranovel, a closely related yet different aesthetic construct we have created out of the mythic content in the plot. And our response has screened out the refinement and complexity of the material's darker, more universal implications' (Sylvester 260).

What I suggest is that the old man with the help of the boy wants to develop an alternative male order where a woman's role can be totally eliminated. Psychoanalytically it may be tantamount to freeing the male psyche from the domination as well as fear of women. Lacan points out that the oedipal complex and the castration complex are closely interrelated to each other : 'But what is not a myth, and which Freud nevertheless formulated soon after the Oedipus complex, is the castration complex.' (Lacan 318) Freud speaks of the mother-fixation that inhibits the male psyche. Hemingway's novella sheds no light on whether the old man has any such obsession except the reference to the sea which he regards with both veneration and fear. Hemingway says regarding the old man : 'He always thought of the sea as *la mar* which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of her as *el mar* which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them.' (Hemingway 29-30) This passage is highly significant as it reveals the old man's attitude to the sea as well as his attitude towards the women. Unlike younger fishermen who look upon the sea as '*el mar*' (Hemingway 30) a sort of male contestant, the old man regards the sea as a feminine or a benevolent mother figure; but at the same time he is afraid of the sea as she does 'wild or wicked things' (Hemingway 30) She sometimes withholds her 'great favour' (Hemingway 30) and 'she could not help them'. (Hemingway 30) It suggests further the uncertainty of the mood of the sea; thus we find both fascination and fear, the Oedipal and castration complex, in the old man for the sea. The old man's thought about the sea which characterizes his attitude towards women as well is explicitly revealed: 'The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought.' (Hemingway 30) These references to the sea underline obliquely the old man's fear of the sea and also highlight his need for liberating himself from such psychic fixation that in turn curbs his independence and undercut his manly vigour which he requires most for his struggle with the elemental forces of nature. In order to free his psyche from the mother-fixation, he plans to develop a male order which is entirely composed of the fishermen, sailors and baseball players; consequently women are all eliminated from his conscious thoughts. Sanderson, however, observes: 'In *The Old Man and the Sea*, as in *Islands in the Stream* (1970) – the posthumously published novel to which the published novella originally belonged – Hemingway offers a world

nearly devoid of real women, and their absence is a cause for sadness. Though the fisherman Santiago finds an audience in the boy Manolin, it is only partial compensation for the loss, through death, of his wife.' (Sanderson 191) In my view, it is the old man's sense of loss which paradoxically leads him to repress the memory of his wife by negating the role of women in his life; so he tries to develop an alternative male order.

This negation of the role of women in the old man's life assumes great significance, because he intends to have complete freedom. Any form of strong attachment (sexual or emotional) to women eventually restricts a man for such a struggle with adverse forces of nature; Hemingway, therefore, wants to ensure that his old protagonist should not be in anyway hindered by such ties with women so that he can concentrate on his professional skill and competence. At the sametime he should confront the threat posed by the hostile universe to his identity. Man's freedom and his subsequent realization of his insignificance constitute, infact, part of the thematics of the existentialist fiction as may be found in Sartre, Camus and Kafka. Like them Hemingway shows the ironic implication of the theme.

The absence of women characters in *The Old Man and the Sea* can be vindicated by the fact that the old man is presented as a shamanic or saintly figure. Philip Young, Carlos Baker, Wirt Williams and others have dwelt at length on the parallelism between the old man and Christ or Saint. Williams, in particular, calls attention to the multilayered structure of *The Old Man and the Sea*, and shows how the Christian fable in the novella works in close collaboration with the other modes of tragedy: 'The most visible fable beneath the naturalistic tragedy of the book is the Christian fable, and it seems so much a part of the first that division may be a violence. It, too, is unambiguously tragic, and it is so in the face of a continuing cogent argument that Christian tragedy is impossible.' (Williams 182) What I suggest is that the old man's elevation to the rank of a saint or a Christ-like figure can not really undermine his psychic need for the repression of the memory of his wife. This is particularly highlighted by the concluding section of the novella. Coming back home only with the skeleton of the big marlin he is clearly in danger of a total collapse however strongly he denies it. At such moments of crisis the memory of his dead wife might have rendered him more vulnerable. In order to counter such probability he wants to uphold his male ego that his defeat is only a temporary setback, and he professes his faith in the assertion: "But man is not made for defeat," he said. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." (Hemingway 103) He plans with the boy for a new journey, and the boy promises to come back to his boat. We, however, feel that the old man is physically unable to make any such venture. To the old man the

boy's promise to rejoin him provides some comfort that his male order still remains intact. Hemingway's last lines of the novella are quite ambiguous as he says: 'The old man was dreaming about the lions.' (Hemingway 127) According to me the old man here is merely indulging in his fantasy because he wants to evade the dreadful reality. The dream about the lions offers him the mere illusion that his world has not yet collapsed. James H. Justus, unlike many other Hemingway critics, significantly observes : 'The heart of Santiago's spiritual victory would seem to be sheer endurance of the fact of failure.' (Justus 105) He, further, states that except for the aesthetic victory there is no real victory in *The Old Man and the Sea* and the other Hemingway later novels : 'Hemingway's dismay in 1952 that his simple story of Santiago was immediately read as parable and allegory of the author grown old, harassed by enemies but still equipped with the finest skills of his contemporaries, was understandably half-hearted and ambiguous. *The Old Man and the Sea* accurately, sensitively, depicts the psychological status of its author, whose view of human possibilities and whose devices for countering that gloomy assessment had not been changed by Depression America, Fascist Spain, or an entire World War. The logic behind the aesthetic of contest (big-game hunting, deep sea fishing, bull-fighting) is precisely the fact that the chaos of living – with violence at its centre – can be mitigated only through human efforts to give it shape and purpose, that is, arbitrarily, by the imposition and acceptance of rules, procedure, and conventions in which the playing of the game itself is its own significance. If there is any "victory" in Santiago's story, it comes because the old fisherman plays out his given game with whatever determination and energy are left. The "victory" in the Thomas Hudson story is even grimmer, and its poignancy lies in the very closeness of protagonist and author.' (Justus 118)

It would be wrong to attribute any misogynistic tendency to Hemingway or his protagonist as may be supposed,<sup>11</sup> because the old man, nowhere in the novella, utters any derogatory remark against women or shows any contempt for them. He has deep veneration for the sea which he regards as 'la mar.' (Hemingway 29) He prays to virgin Mary : "Hail Mary full of Grace the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen." (Hemingway 65) He decides to offer a special prayer to Virgin of Cobre, perhaps in memory of his dead wife as she was her devotee.<sup>12</sup> It would be equally naive to assume that the old man asserts his male chauvinism.<sup>13</sup> (Sanderson 170-171) Far from being so Hemingway wants to explore the probability regarding whether men can create an order which is self-content and which can offer better scope for

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professional competence and skill to overcome the catastrophic forces of nature. Like the old man Hemingway needs complete freedom and self-mastery to maintain his artistic excellence. His devotion to art is so rigorous that he can forego the claim of women, but never abandon his artistic vocation.

### Notes and References

1. Rena Sanderson, in "Hemingway and Gender History," cites Swan, Leader and Neumann who regard the sea representing the true woman in the novella.
2. To Baker, the old man's vision of the lions appears quite significant as he comments: 'For Santiago it is not the coast of Java but that of Africa, not the faces of the brown men crowding the jetty but the playing lions, which carry the associations of youth, strength, and even immortality.' ("The Boy and the Lions" 311) He, by juxtaposing the lions with the boy in *The Old Man and the Sea*, discovers the dominant symbolic pattern of the novella.  
Young does not attach much significance to the lion reverie; nevertheless he associates it with Santiago's youth: 'On the public level the lions, for instance, are only so vague as the "poetry" in Santiago, and perhaps the sign of his nostalgia for his youth.' (Ernest Hemingway : A Reconsideration 128.)
3. James H. Nagel, in "Brett and the Other Women in *The Sun Also Rises*," elaborately dwells on Hemingway's presentation of the women characters in *The Sun Also Rises*. Rena Sanderson, in "Hemingway and Gender History," briefly studies Hemingway's women characters in his novels and short stories.
4. See Philip Young (123); Arthur Waldhorn (189-190).
5. Waldhorn (189-190).
6. Quoted by Gaytri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Translator's Preface," *Of Grammatology*. She wants to show how Derrida's conception of absence and presence has been influenced by Nietzsche and Heidegger.
7. Young (Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration), Baker ("The Boy and the Lions") and others have dealt with the significance of the old man's dreams and reveries. Sylvester provides us with all the relevant details about Dimaggio and the other great baseball players mentioned in the novella – "The Cuban Context of *The Old Man and the Sea*," (246-252). He also brings out the broad cultural implications of the baseball allusions in the novella.
8. Sanderson notes the responses of the women readers to Hemingway's masculine poses and his supposed antagonism to women; further she adds: 'In 1940 Edmund Wilson, an early admirer of Hemingway, was one of the first to criticize his "growing antagonism" to women (237). Critics of the novels declared that Hemingway could not depict women or that he was better at depicting men without women (Fiedler; Wilson). It became common for critics to divide his fictional women into either castrators or love-slaves, either "bitches" or helpmates

– the simplicity of the dichotomy presumably mirroring Hemingway's own sexist mind-set (Whitlow 10-15).’ (170-171). She, however, points out that when reevaluation of Hemingway's women characters began in the backdrop of the feminist movement and the gender issues, earlier assumption was rejected.

9. Baker, in detail, discusses the role of the boy in *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of the old man's psychological needs and also finds the symbolic pattern based on the juxtaposition of the boy with the lions. (306-319) Sylvester analyzes the role of the boy in terms of the initiation theme as well as the socioeconomic conflict between the two generations (257-258).

10. Baker notes that the boy reminds the old man of his own lost youth (311).

11. See note no. 8.

12. ‘Much of the novel is directly or indirectly associated with the Virgin of Cobre. Near Cobre, a small town in southeastern Cuba, is the sanctuary of Lady of Charity, a small statue of the Virgin Mary. An image of the Virgin hangs on Santiago's wall, as it does in most Cuban houses; the text implies that his wife may, like many other Cubans, have made a pilgrimage to the shrine and brought back this picture.’ (Sylvester 252). Sylvester also cites the legends connected with the Virgin of Cobre.

13. See note no. 8.

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# Mansfield's Quest for Identity: Cultural Locations and Relocations

*Sumita Naskar*

Katherine Mansfield, the colonial, who had escaped to the literary capital, London and later to the continent, discovered some of the richest sources of her art in the New Zealand to which she had so petulantly bidden farewell. Incidentally, we also know Mansfield as the emancipated woman, who married John Middleton Murty on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1918, after living with him for seven years; and the fastidious writer, who felt, "... there mustn't be one single word out of place, or one word that could be taken out. That's how I AIM at writing."<sup>1</sup> (*The Letters and Journals of Katherine Mansfield* 213)

However, understanding Katherine Mansfield becomes lucid if we take into account a very important passage in Mansfield's *Scrapbook* of 1921 (which has to be quoted in full), where she informs us:

My literary career began with short story writing in New Zealand. I was nine years old when my first attempt was published. I have been filling note-books ever since. After I came to London I worked for sometime for the *New Age*)<sup>2</sup> and published *In a German Pension* ...It was a bad book, but the press was kind to it...I have written more short stories. Such a prolonged exercise ought to have produced something a great deal better than *Bliss*; I hope the book on which I am engaged will be more worthy of the interest of the public. It is a collection of stories—One with a New Zealand setting in the style of *Prelude*. Several are character sketches of women rather like poor Miss Ada Moss in the story *Pictures* (*The Scrapbook of Katherine Mansfield* 186).

The first sentence of the quoted paragraph makes it amply clear that Katherine Mansfield took her writing seriously from a very young age. Her first attempt was *Enna Blake* (1898), when she was a student of Wellington Girls' High School. This story was published with the name of the writer given as Kathleen Beauchamp, aged 9 years.

Katherine Mansfield, born on October 14, 1888 in Wellington, New Zealand, and christened Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp—the third daughter of the wealthy banker, Mr. Harold Beauchamp (Sir Harold in 1923), and Mrs. Annie Beauchamp—received her preliminary schooling in Wellington. In 1903, Kathleen was sent with her two sisters, Chaddie and Verra, chaperoned by their aunt, Belle Dyer, to complete their education at Queen's College, Harley

Street, London. Here, the Beauchamp sisters stayed until 1906. Kathleen, as she was known to her family, took violoncello lessons at the London Academy of Music, edited the college magazine; and under the tutelage of Mr. Walter Rippman, the German Professor, she immersed herself in the literature of the period: the works of Pater, Wilde, Symons, Dowson and other Decadents. Kathleen's Journal of the year 1907 bears eloquent testimony to the spell Wilde and his group had on her. It is interesting to note that Isabel Constance Clarke in her illuminating biography of Mansfield feels that "the perverted view of life" of these writers, did much to poison her fresh beautiful mind, because "she had not yet learned to eschew the evil, to retain the good." (*Katherine Mansfield* 9) Nevertheless, Oscar Wilde evoked for Kathleen a world undreamt of in New Zealand where she had led a sheltered existence. When the Beauchamps came to London to collect the three sisters after the completion of her college education, Kathleen reluctantly sailed for New Zealand. But she nurtured in her heart a firm determination to return to London. Her metropolitan experience had emphasized the philistine vulgarity of her native land. She was "ashamed of New Zealand" and harboured the opinion that—"... a mad wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, of super-aestheticism should intoxicate the country..."<sup>3</sup> (*The Collected Letters of Katherine Mansfield* I:44). At home, the eighteen year old Kathleen, who possessed the temperament but had not developed the power of the artist, was intensely irritated when the banalities of everyday existence impinged upon her imaginative reverie. For instance, in her journal (*The Journal of Katherine Mansfield* 21) the exasperated Kathleen declares:

Damn my family; O Heavens what bores they are; I detest them...Even when I am alone in my room in New Zealand they come outside and call to each other, discuss the butcher's orders and the soiled line and—I feel — wreck my life (Ibid).

In 1907 to the teenaged artistically disposed Kathleen, New Zealand was a detestable provincial durance from which escape was a necessity. She announced, "...I must wander; I cannot—will not—build a house upon any damned rock..." (Ibid 15). She was oblivious (quite naturally so) of the fact that she would be doomed to peregrinate all her life and in later life she would pine for stability—a home and babies.<sup>4</sup>

It may be pointed out that the painter, Frances Hodgkins, born and brought up in New Zealand, was also disillusioned by her experiences in Wellington in 1905. She disliked the supercilious complacency of the inhabitants of the island, "...Wellington is not an artistic centre. Neither I nor my work was ever popular there."<sup>5</sup>

Another artist, Rupert Brooke, who met Katherine Mansfield later in England, passed through Wellington in January, 1914, and wrote to his mother, "...New Zealand isn't a frightfully interesting country, I fancy."(Brooke, *Letters* 560)

In Kathleen Beauchamp's case, her Headmistress of Wellington Girls' High School retrospectively realized that the Beauchamp family, "...was very conventional, Kass was the outlaw... They just tried to make her conform."(*The Life of Katherine Mansfield* 153). This is exactly what Kathleen refused to do. To bow down to restrictions was not in her nature. By January, 1907, Kathleen was resolved to be an authoress, although she was nurturing a desire to be a professional cellist. "...Music is not my forte...I must be an authoress," she wrote in a journal of 1907 (*The Journal of Katherine Mansfield* 8).

Of course, the gesture of adopting a pseudonym was not calculated to disregard or disparage a family name, Beauchamp, but a declaration of independence, a desire to be recognized as a person in her own right, capable of establishing her new identity as a writer.

The innate desire to be an authoress inspired the headstrong, liberated Katherine to wage a relentless battle with her parents. Mr. Beauchamp tried to divert the thought of a rebellious daughter and tried to gain a little more time before he reached a final decision about Katherine's intention to leave New Zealand, by arranging for her to be included in a caravan trip through the wild and uncultivated country of North Island, New Zealand. This expedition achieved two results—it acquainted Mansfield with the wilder parts of his own country and furnished her with the raw material for the story, *The Woman at the Store* (1911), a macabre story of murder in the bush country; not particularly characteristic of her genius, but certainly illustrating how carefully she hoarded every bit of experience. If this six-week tour (November 15 – December 17, 1907), was designed to lead the thoughts of the aspiring writer away from London, it failed to achieve its goal. Katherine was quite convinced:

I shall never be able to live at home. I can plainly see that. There would be constant friction...They [the family] are quite unbearable and so absolutely my mental inferiors (*Ibid* 7).

Coupled with this conviction came the, "first experience of a personal loss"(*The Collected Letters* I: 21) — the death of her grandmother on December 31, 1907, which "horrified" and intensified her wish to escape to London. Katherine's emotional attachment for granny (Margaret Isabel Dyer, neé Mansfield), is discernible not only in the poem<sup>6</sup> composed in 1909 but also fifteen years later when Katherine reminded herself in her journal, "...And

one day I must write about grandma at length...I remember now how lovely she seemed to me."(*Journal* 269) Mansfield fulfilled the desire in *Prelude* and two other stories, both included in *The Garden Party and Other Stories—At the Bay and The Voyage*.

Surprisingly, another potent factor that compelled the senior Beauchamps to accede to their daughter's demands was Katherine's "fits of madness", resembling those of Wilde, her favourite writer of her adolescent years. In a letter to Ida Baker, a devoted friend of her London college days, Katherine confesses:

In New Zealand, Wilde acted so strongly and terribly upon me that I was constantly subject to exactly the same fits of madness as those which caused his ruin and his mental decay. (*Collected Letters* I: 89-90)<sup>7</sup>

A perusal of this letter, written before April, 1909, will prove that it is difficult to agree with Mr. Noriman Hormasji, when he assumes that Mansfield had,— "...deliberately written such a piece [Journal entry dated June, 1, 1907 (14)], so as to influence her parents' decision to send her away from the immediate danger of being engulfed in the disaster."<sup>8</sup> Katherine was highly imaginative and introspective but she was not spinning any tale to seek her freedom from parental control.

It is a truism that Katherine Mansfield was too fiercely independent to attach much value to wealth and fame. Her impetuous yearning to be unconventional is detected in a momentous decision she took when she was in Wellington. This was, breaking down all parental pressures and leaving the shores of New Zealand for London on July 9, 1908, with an allowance of hundred pounds from her father, fortified with her courage as well as with her manuscripts. It was only in her imagination and in her dreams (*Journal* 55) that Mansfield ever saw the shores of her island home.<sup>9</sup> Katherine Mansfield was seldom content with place and time present; only when the past had receded beyond any possession except that of memory did it become a time of happiness and the future remained hopeful only when it is still tomorrow.

While she was in Wellington, Katherine was well aware:

That genius is dormant in every soul—that that very individuality which is at the root of our being is what matters so poignantly (*Journal* 37).

Katherine was also convinced that her own country was far too young and too orthodox to fathom her latent genius. But this awareness of latent power did not make her merely arrogant. We notice Mansfield's humility in acknowledging that her first book- *In a German Pension* – was "bad" but

the "press was kind to it". This self-critical ability enabled her to depict the pathos of the lives of Miss Brill, Ma Parker, Ellen, the maid, and the two daughters of the Late Colonel, in *The Garden Party and Other Stories*.

Besides, the quoted passage from her *Scrapbook* also underlines the fastidiousness of Katherine Mansfield. In fact, when the precisionist in her was assured that both the first and the second volume had failed to meet her exacting standards, then the forthcoming collection or *The Garden Party and Other Stories* would be composed as to overcome the deficiencies, and as a consequence, be all-embracing. Her final volume is undoubtedly all-comprehensive. But, *Bliss and Other Stories* was noticed by the critics. Mr. Conrad Aiken's "The Short story as Poetry", in *The Freeman*, III, (May 11, 1921: 210), acclaimed Mansfield's fine "infinitely inquisitive sensibility", the "shimmering" world she had created and her high control of form. However, an artist like Katherine Mansfield was not satisfied with this collection of stories, she regarded to be "trivial". In this connection, she may be acknowledged as her own greatest critic.

The long paragraph which has been cited from Mansfield's *Scrapbook* may be accepted as an introduction to *The Garden Party and Other Stories*, since the author's aims are expressed in that paragraph. For example, "...one with a New Zealand setting..." points to the first story of the book—*At the Bay*. Again, the reference to, "...character sketches of women..." clearly indicates four other stories making up the body of the volume—*The Daughters of the Late Colonel*, *Life of Ma Parker*, *The Lady's Maid* and *Miss Brill*.

Furthermore, the final sentence,—"several are character sketches of women rather like poor Miss Ada Moss in the story, *Pictures*"—draws our attention to that sensitive, feminine world of Mansfield, which is one of her primary contributions to the story; the world which she knows so well from her sojourn in the continent and painted so memorably in her final volume. The word "poor", again, denotes her sympathy for the under-privileged. This compassion for the downtrodden is also expressed in a number of stories, belonging to this volume—*The Garden Party and Miss Brill* may be cited as examples.

Lastly, Mansfield's consciousness of public opinion voiced in the sentence,—"I hope the book on which I am engaged will be more worthy of the interest of the public", recalls another statement made by the writer, "I cannot go foisting that kind of stuff [*In a German Pension*] on the public. [because] it is too immature and I don't even acknowledge it today." (*The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*. II: 14) Mansfield considered her first book to be "juvenile". Both the declarations unveil the purist in her. It is this facet of her nature which prompted her to refuse some five hundred pounds offered to her by publishers for reprinting her first volume in 1920, even when

Katherine urgently required the money for the medical treatment she was undergoing for tuberculosis. She did not even try to exploit the anti-Germany feelings by re-publishing her first volume *In a German Pension*. She was too dignified a person to stoop so low as to compromise with her artistic principles.

This fidelity to her inner convictions and an individualistic streak ever prominent in Katherine's personality forbade her to seek an opportune moment to ventilate her misgivings about Germany. For, in 1920 she could have counted on her satirical, ill-humoured, and cynical, *In a German Pension* being popular owing to the anti-Germany feeling in the air. At a glance the Bavarian sketches included in this book stress the gross, uncouth behaviour of the German men. These Germans are depicted at their worst—guzzling beer to drown a mouthful of meat and bread; the predatory male asserting his physical superiority over his wife, men and women occupying their time satiating their carnal appetites. For instance, Herr Rat (with a meaningful name) in the story, *Germans at Meat* proudly announces, "This morning, I took a half-bath. Then this afternoon I must take a knee bath and an arm bath" (13). This volunteering of information relating to personal hygiene, one can do without, but it is not so where Herr Rat is concerned. The Baron, in the short sketch named after him—a man looked upon with reverential awe by every intimate of the pension because of his superior social position—reveals his secret, : I sit alone that I may eat more...I order double portions, and eat them in peace"(18). Again, *The Sister of the Baroness* underlines the wasted efforts of the guests residing in the pension. Their mistaken notions about royalty prompted them to accept the maid as the sister of the baroness. This is, indeed, foolishness, but this kind of mistaken belief may well be found in our daily lives. It is true that Mansfield in her first book conveys a sense of life and reveals her power of observation, but it is always as an outsider, a by-stander, who vehemently dislikes her companions and is rather cynically observing her surroundings. The tone is bitter and harsh at times and the intention is to satirise. The volume also emphasizes the writer's revulsion against the vulgar, snobbish people and the gross, physical details of their crude, prosaic lives. After all, the book represents a youthful, immature phase of Mansfield's authorship; the majority of the stories were composed in the retreat of a Bavarian village, Bad Worishofen, where she gave birth to a still-born child. The very wretchedness of her situation—married to George Bowden<sup>10</sup> who was not the father of her child, and recuperating all alone in an unknown European village, where Katherine was sent by her mother to conceal the scandal—was material of the abovementioned pictures of German life and manners.

Katherine Mansfield's dignity as a woman and her acute awareness of herself as an artist were revealed in her reluctance to republish her *In a German*

*Pension*. This recognition of being an artist is again highlighted in a letter to her friend, Anne Estelle Rice, dated March 24, 1920, where Katherine confides:

I am living here with relations<sup>11</sup>—the dearest people, only they are not artists. You know what that means? I love them, and they have been just too good and dear to me, but they are not in the same world as we are and I pine for my own people, my own wandering tribe (*The Letters of Katherine Mansfield*, II: 24).

In another letter (dated March 1920), this time to her husband, Middleton Murry, Katherine declares, "It is strain to live away from one's own tribe, with people, who, however, dear they are, are not ARTISTS." (Ibid 24-25). Katherine Mansfield was not conceited, she did not parade her learning, she underestimated her talent, but she was conscious of being an artist.<sup>12</sup> The basic assumption of these letters, a romantic one, is that artists are *sui generis*, a race apart and liberated from all obligations that fetter mankind and this explains the waywardness, brilliance and the pathos of Mansfield's career.

### Notes And References

1. Mansfield wrote this in a letter dated January 17, 1921, to her brother-in-law, Richard Murry. She wrote the word "AIM" in capital letters.
2. Mansfield's first book, *In a German Pension* published in 1911 won the approval of A.R. Orange, the editor of *The New Age*. Orange knew literary talent when he saw it. Both Orange and his friend, Beatrice Hastings, were Katherine's companions.
3. Katherine in a letter to her sister, Vera Beauchamp (written from 4, Fitzherbert Terrace), in April-May 1908 wrote this.
4. Katherine lost the baby of Garnett Trowell in a Bavarian village in 1909. All her life she longed to have a baby of her own, unfortunately this longing was never satisfied. See *The Letters and Journals* (57). In this letter dated March 23, 1915, Katherine expresses her desire to have babies. Her *Journal* (193), too, records her yearning for children.
5. See E.H. McCormick, *The Expatriate: A Study of Frances Hodgkins* (104). The Letter of January 1918 contains the quoted remark.
6. This poem entitled "The Grandmother" reveals Katherine's love for Mrs. Dyer. See *Scrapbook* (5).
7. The Letter was written to Ida Baker before April 1909 from London.
8. Nariman Hosmanji in his valuable study of Katherine Mansfield suggests that the years 1907 and 1908 were two memorable years of the author's adolescence. See *Katherine Mansfield: An Appraisal* (Sydney, Halstead Press, 1967) 18.

Mr. Hormasji has in mind the journal entry of p.14 where Katherine records her unusually intense feelings for her female friend.

9. The entry of March 19 and 20, 1914, records two dreams about New Zealand.
10. Katherine married George Bowden, a singing teacher, on March 2, 1909, whom she met in London, and her biographer, Mr. Antony Alpers, tells us that she left him the next day. Katherine was legally separated from her husband in 1918. On May 3, 1918, she married J. Middleton Murry and finally settled down with him. See Antony Alpers, *The Life of Katherine Mansfield* (404 and 412).
11. Katherine was living in a villa owned by her wealthy cousins, Connie Beauchamp and Jinnie Fullerton. Hence she refers to them as 'relations' in her letter of March, 1920.
12. In her Journal entry of November 13, 1921 Mansfield records, "My deepest desire is to be a writer to have a 'body of work' done...I must try and write simply, fully, freely from my heart. See *The Journal* (270).

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# Intersection of Various Discourses: A Study of Annabella's heart in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

*Paromita Deb*

In past decade, there has been a proliferation of studies on the body. The Renaissance body, especially in the theatre, is recognized as political – a site for the operation of power and the exercise of meaning. In other words, the early modern body was a site where political, religious, cultural and medical discourses intersected and merged. Leonardo's, Michelangelo's, or, Dürer's gorgeous portraits of individual organs of the body, Marot's emblazoning of the beloved's body in his poems, Donne's extraordinary meditations on particular body parts or, mutilation of body parts in early modern dramas – collectively speak about the attention devoted to individual organs.<sup>1</sup> Like the body in totality, individual parts of the body, in their imagined relationship to the divine, were also invested with varying degrees of significance in the literature and culture of the period. The body and its organs were ever present sources of tropes, metaphors and similes.

The worldwide circulation of the heart symbol through art, literature and religious worship in the contemporary period, made the heart probably the most popular bodily symbol and emblem. The heart enjoyed an important material place with respect to anatomy's improved understanding of its mechanical use as a blood pump of the body. Simultaneously, it occupied a significant religious and metaphorical space as the early modern religious order, like 'the Cult of the Sacred Heart' was organized around the heart. Modes of staging the dismembered heart were simultaneously shaped by and reinforced cultural meanings. Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633) remains one of the few contemporary plays elaborately dramatizing the mutilation of the heroine's heart. Critics of this play primarily dealt with cruelty, the brother-sister relationship and incestuous body of Annabella (see Rosen 356 – 366; Mintz 269 – 90; Wiseman 181 -197). The longest discussion on the importance of the heart in this play is that by D.K. Anderson, who noted that the recurrent heart and the banquet imageries 'progress from the figurative to the literal' in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Broken Heart* (also 1633), emphasizing their central theme as, neither self – indulgence nor self – denial leads to happiness, respectively (Anderson 209–17). However, his listing of all the references to the 'heart' lacks detailed analysis of their social, political and cultural connotations. The dismembered heart of Annabella in the former play, as not only an important but a subtle metaphor in terms of an inter-

disciplinary study, has not yet been extensively considered. Her heart is more than a visible signifier or, a vital body organ. It envelops the action of the play in a subtle and theatrical body language, as it conveys thoughts beyond the reach of spoken language. This essay argues that Annabella's heart is an amalgam of a whole range of significations or, meanings, by exploring its anatomical significance, its emblematic, political and gendered relevance, in succeeding parts. Finally, the paper concludes by highlighting that the heart in Ford's play, when read in the context of challenging the boundaries of traditionally diverse fields, is indicative of a more complex understanding of both contemporary society and that of ours.

## I

Interestingly, in the early modern age, the heart had a new prominence because of its central position in the body. No longer a mystery, the body – as the contemporary anatomists revealed — contained a mechanistic process, similar to the other processes and systems which operated in the natural and social worlds. Harvey (1578-1657) understood the mechanism of venous circulation, and postulated that the heart is a pump which makes the blood circulate from the arteries to the veins.<sup>2</sup> Further, drawing on traditional macrocosm/microcosm correlations, he wrote in 1653, about the mechanism of blood circulation and the heart: 'To the heart is the beginning of life, the Sun of the Microcosm, as proportionally the Sun deserves to be called the heart of the world, by whose virtue, and pulsation, the blood is moved perfected, made vegetable, and is defended from corruption, and mattering; and this familiar household-god doth his duty to the whole body, by nourishing, cherishing, and vegetating, being the foundation of life, and author of all'.<sup>3</sup> So, the heart ceased to be a mere passive object of contemplation, having a monarchial influence on the other body organs. Rather it had its own "office" and "work" to perform within the large structure of a mechanical process.

Moreover, as Jonathan Sawday emphasized in *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, the period from early sixteenth to seventeenth century witnessed the rise of a culture in which the opening of the human body was considered a central act in the obtainment of knowledge. 'To know our enemies' minds', as Edgar says in Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605), 'we rip their hearts' (IV.vi.260). Again, Lear seeks an anatomical explanation, of the hardened and invisible nature of Regan in the imagined opening of her body:

Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart.  
Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard-hearts?  
(III.vi.33-5)

Through Lear' reference to the science of anatomy, Shakespeare questions the validity of such religious, secular and emblematic connotations about specific body parts, especially when contemporary physiology was beginning to question the function of the heart as an important muscle, rather than as an organ of thought and as the centre of emotional life. In '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*', Ford further complicates this idea, and we see Giovanni ripping Annabella's heart not only to unravel her secret, but also to prove and thereby locate his identity as her true lover within her body – as he explains "tis a heart in which mine is entombed".

So, it is important to note the connection between the early modern desire for scientific discovery through anatomical investigation and the violent dismantling of Annabella's body in Ford's play. Taking forward Foucault's analysis one can say that, in the play's last scene, the patriarchal law of Parma is symbolically inscribed on the heroine's body, thereby giving her a new identity of the scientific subject.<sup>4</sup> Annabella's plight, then, seems to echo from a different angle the mythical competition in which satyr Marsyas was both a competitor and the prize for Apollo in Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. The final punishment for the transgressor against either divine or, human (patriarchal) law, in both cases, is to be made a spectacle under the flaying knife of authority. As Edgar Wind (173) has observed, the story also expressed the process 'by which the terrestrial Marsyas was tortured so that the heavenly Apollo might be crowned'. Understood thus, the Marsyas story can be related to Giovanni's final act – his identity depends on Annabella's death. Giovanni explains the significance of his evisceration of her heart in metaphors of consumption –

'I digged for food  
In a much richer mine than gold or stone  
Of any value balanced; 'tis a heart, ...'. (V.vi.23 – 28)

Therefore, the child borne out of Giovanni and Annabella is cut off as the latter's womb is invaded by her lover. Here, Annabella's body, then, evidently seems to suggest both a particularly anatomical and vaginal image, in which her brother has "digged" his own buried heart.

## II

Since the early Middle Ages, the heart was used in Christian iconography, poetry and the visual arts to represent love. Significantly, with the advent of print technology and the emblem tradition, images of the heart – as the Sacred Heart of Jesus – the heart symbol became more popular. A pan-European phenomenon, the Renaissance emblem in its canonical form was a three-part invention consisting typically of a titular inscription, a picture, and a short text, usually in verse, and ideally epigrammatic in form (Russell 65–67). It

evolved into a rhetorical vehicle that could be adapted to a wide variety of media and carry a wide range of messages from humanist precepts to religious doctrine, political propaganda and satire.

In *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, we find both conventional and unconventional uses of the heart emblem. In the 17<sup>th</sup>. Century, the heart was particularly associated with love and passion. Robert Burton's explanation of 'Love' in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) is quite similar to that experienced by Giovanni and Annabella—

For Love is a perpetual flux, "angor animi", a warfare, "militat omnis amans", ... a Lovers heart is "Cupids" quiver, a consuming fire ... an inextinguible fire ... This continual paine and torture makes them forget themselves. (3. 2. 3.1)

Again, the emblem of the 'heart on a coat of arms' stood for eternal faithfulness and courage. Giovanni's entry in the play's last scene with his sister – lover Annabella's 'heart upon his dagger', therefore, makes a travesty of this emblematic connotation. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, too, we find a brilliant parody of the traditional use of visual rhetoric (Diehl 198–206). The picture of Fortune's favourite rising to the top of the wheel is made ironic. When Lorenzo and Balthazar murder Horatio, they hang their victim high on a tree with the boast,

'Although his life were still ambitious proud

Yet he is at the "highest" now he is "dead". (II.iv.60 -61)

In the chaotic world of this play, traditional associations of high and low, though they are called up, are no longer meaningful. Instead ironic inversion of the traditional fall from fortune contributes to a sense of radical disorientation in Kyd's play. Seen from this perspective, as Diehl concludes, the dramatic world of both *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and Kyd's drama, defies traditional explanations and emblematic traditions (206).

However, I would like to add another point to Diehl's explanation of the inversion of the traditions of visual rhetoric reflecting a parallel parody and irony of the traditional order of things.<sup>5</sup> Rightly, he elucidates that, just as by subverting the well – known meanings of such icons we are exposed to the incompatibility of the existing iconographic tradition and the Tudor and Stuart dramas, by critiquing the contemporary social order Kyd and Ford highlights the fallacy behind the basic rationale of such apparently ordered social structure. Symbolic meaning of the reversals of stage icons and realistic presentation of the critique of the existing social polarization enhance one another. It can be elaborated that the irony and subtlety related with the use of the rich and popular visual iconography, it can be argued, had wider

connotations, in terms of the overall analysis of these plays – in rendering contemporary society unintelligible and confusing. Further, this paper highlights, the disorderliness of the formal order of things, as in the stage icons and cultural emblems of the tongue and heart, aptly culminates in the disruption of the corporeal order through Hieronimo's lingual self – dismemberment and Giovanni's mutilation of his sister's heart in the last acts of Kyd's and Ford's play respectively.

Significantly, in Ford's use of the heart emblem in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* we see the witty reversal of an earlier revenge play – Robert Wilmot's *The Tragedy of Tancred and Gismund* (1591 -2). By comparison with Wilmot's, the symbolism of Ford's tableau seems both diffuse and obscure: where Wilmot offers a simple choice between the rival readings imposed on Guisnard's heart by the tyrant and his resilient victim, Giovanni's feverishly excited language exposes his sister's heart to a bewildering variety of competing interpretations. Ironically, Ford's Giovanni resembles both Tancred and Gismund. He seems to resemble the exulting Tancred, as when he offers Annabella's husband his murderous parody of the conceit of the exchange - of – hearts traditionally symbolizing intense love (V. vi. 72, 73). On the other hand, he appears more like Gismund when he presents himself as the devourer of Annabella's heart (V. vi 24, 25). Yet in the same breath he seeks to identify himself as the passive Guizard – or – Memnon – like victim of a fatal passion, holding up to the company 'a heart... in which is mine entombed' (27). Perhaps, by such witty reversal from the preceding play, in terms of the use of the heart, the playwright wanted to ensure that Annabella's heart in this play was dramatized as no mere instrument for fulfilling the revenge motif. Thus, in Ford's handling of the mutilated heart, we find many more layers of complexity, owing to his particularly mature handling of the heart emblem.

Again, the play's action can be seen as enfolding through a series of emblematic tableau of heart, that figure the affiliative relations among persons, and between individuals and the sovereign state. In an excellent survey of early modern marital imagery, Dale Randall connected conventional symbolism of heart and hand to the tradition of betrothal rings (178). Rings, characteristically shaped as two clasped hands thought to be joined to the heart by a vein were commonly worn on the third finger of the left hand. Wither's emblem "En Dextra Fithes Que", is a well-known example of this pervasive imagery, which illustrates this trope as hand in hand holding a heart.<sup>6</sup> The heart could be interpreted as representing will and intention, while the hand – the action proceeding directly from it. But, in attempting to explain the agreement between intention and deed, Wither intelligently focused on the dangers implied by this synecdochic logic:

'When thou dost reach thy "hand" unto thy friend,  
Take order thy "heart" unto thy friend,  
For, otherwise in Hand, or Heart, thou lyest,  
And cutest off a member, e'er thou dyest' (ln. 13- 16).

As in Wither's emblem, so in Ford's play, marital bonds seemed always to hint at their own severance. From the very first Act, Annabella's and Giovanni's relation seem to be doomed. In the second Act, as Giovanni offers his own heart as well as his dagger to his sister –

'And here's my heart, strike home  
Rip up my bosom ....' (II.ii.209-10)

— he uncannily reverses verbally the play's final image of his sister's heart wrenched in ritualized murder. So, in the play's last scene, the conventional trope of the hand holding the heart is transformed into a bond notable for its discord and dissemblance.

Taking this argument further, this article proposes that not only in the marital sense, but also in martial terms, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, the imagery of the severed heart disarms the conventions of marriage and political dynasty, which it is supposed to represent and implement. The inability of Florio, the father of Annabella and Giovanni and the King of Parma, to protect and care for the lives of his children as well as kingdom is an obvious symbol of his failure as a father and sovereign. The dramatic mutilation of Annabella's heart, thereby, confirms the precariousness of the political and civil metaphors of the body.

### III

Reading the symbolism of the body highlights the underlying truth that materialist, metaphorical, political and gendered discourses occupy parallel rather than exclusive realms. The political importance of the heart in the rituals of public punishment is also noteworthy. In the course of drawing and quartering of the traitors, for example, it was customary for the executioner to cut out the victim's heart and display it for the execration of the crowd. Holinshed's accounts of the execution reveals how the 'traitorous heart' of the conspirators were often burnt and mutilated, and exposed to the prying gaze of the audience for preaching political lessons (Cunningham 209 - 222). The highly theatrical nature of Giovanni's vision of himself as 'a glorious executioner' offering his sister's heart as a token of the 'justice' he has achieved (V. vi. 33, 102), initially, invites a reading of the heart in the same straight-forward emblematic terms. On every person's heart, so the metaphor went, was inscribed the truth of his or her feelings: the public executioner in the scaffolds of punishment in the early modern state made the metaphor

real at the same time as ritual cloaked the mutilated flesh in the decay of metaphor. This paper argues that such notions were socially popularized by the contemporary governments for political and judicial gains. Thus, in other words, the emblematic and cultural meanings of the body and its parts were deeply rooted in the complex historicity of the Elizabethan and Jacobean communities, which they helped to reveal and by which they were influenced. Annabella's execution in Ford's play, therefore, offers, to some extent, a mimesis of state punishment, like that of Isabella's in *The Insatiate Countess* (1610), thereby exposing the unsettling dualities of such deaths. Hence, these plays also highlight the containment of bodily violence by the state in the name of law and judiciary.

Further, the representation of dismemberment of female bodies in these Jacobean plays reminds us of political as well as gendered difference. The early modern law offered crucial insights into the possible fate of sexual offenders, and particularly the female body. The legal restrictions placed on English women in the contemporary period were 'exceptionally severe', 'even by the standards of other early modern European countries' (Erickson 1). The Puritan government enacted strict laws on adultery with harsh and unequal provisions: adulterous women and not men were commonly punished. Also, in the 16<sup>th</sup>. and 17<sup>th</sup>. Centuries, there was a huge volume of didactic literature meant to instruct women – sermons, conduct books and moralizing tracts abounded. Barbara Kreps pointed out numerous ways in which both sexual and financial matters, as far as women were concerned, were unevenly and conflictually provided for under the several jurisdictions of Tudor and Stuart law (83). Moreover, in the Renaissance, woman was a subject of 'constant surveillance', since the female body seemed, in some way, 'naturally grotesque' – a body which potentially escaped any boundary or, limit (Stallybrass 126). The incestuous woman's body would be publicly demonstrated and she would be physically punished at sites of central importance in civil and religious society – the Church and the market. In such cases, unfortunately, it is always the female body – as here, Annabella's body rather than Giovanni's – which comes to bear the meaning of their transgression. Thus, though Giovanni claims –

‘And here's my breast, strike home!

Rip up my bosom, there thou shalt behold

A heart in which is writ the truth I speak.’ (II.ii.209 –11)

— it is in Annabella's heart that he finally seeks the truth of their relationship. Interestingly, the single woman's pregnant body partly confesses her crime. However, as the body of the woman did not reveal the child's father, pregnant women were subjected to mental and physical torture to elicit a confession

of paternity. In 1613, for instance, Joan Lea was 'openly whipped at a cart's tail in St. John's Street ... until her body be all bloody', and in 1644 Jennett Hawkes was ordered to be 'stripped naked from the middle upwards, and presently be soundly whipped through the town of Wetherby' (Wiseman 185). Soranzo's questioning Annabella to reveal the name of the child's father in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*:

'Not know it strumpet! I'll rip up thy heart and find it there' — alerts us to the rigid marital and legal structures governing the female body. Evidently, the control of the woman's body was the source of much domestic violence in contemporary society. The husband's reference to ripping up his wife's heart as part of her punishment reminds us of the earlier exchange of vows between Annabella and her lover, while simultaneously echoing the rhetoric used in a lovers' exchange of hearts. Besides, by Soranzo's use of the words, "rip" up thy heart' and Giovanni's actually doing so, they render Annabella's body as perversely attractive. The playwright, thereby, uses this drama set in Parma to critique the regulation of sexuality and women's bodies in early modern England.

Thus, Ford in this play addressed the double standard arising from contradictions among the culture's discourses regarding women, and rose to their defense by exposing the fallacious logic of sexual disparity on which it is based. The sins of the male characters in the play: for instance, Soranzo's verbally and physically abusing his wife and Giovanni's literally dismembering Annabella's body — are far more serious than that of the heroine. By contrasting Soranzo's seducing the 'lusty widow' Hippolita into adultery and his accusation of his wife as 'strumpet', the dramatist pointed out the ludicrousness of men setting a different standard for women than the one they maintained for themselves. Women were always accountable — be it Hippolita for sharing Soranzo's adulterous desire, or Putana for being a witness to an incestuous brother — sister relationship, or Annabella being a partner in the incest. And, more significantly, it was the female body which faced the severest civil and religious punishments for the adulterous and incestuous relationships: Hippolita, referred as a 'mistress she — devil' by Vasques (IV. i. 68 — 9), is burnt, Putana is blinded and Annabella is mutilated and condemned by the Cardinal as a 'whore' in the closing lines (V. vi.) — all of them being victims of the duplicity of the courtly law. In other words, therefore, Giovanni — through his brutal murdering, and the Cardinal — by his discursive power, rewrite the meaning of Annabella's disturbingly transgressive body and desire, to fit her into safer patriarchal narratives about female sexuality.

### Conclusion

The paper, thereby, highlights that such performances as *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* represented cultural evasions of the imposition of contemporary disciplinary power. Despite the popularity of key discourses of bodily control – like conduct manuals, legal texts, and emblems – dramas enacted resistance to such disciplining codes. In this process, playwrights like Ford, not only exposed the contradictions and inconsistencies in the repressive official discourses, but also simultaneously dramatized the ways in which the multiplicity of the body and its parts challenged these discourses.

Drawing upon Mary Douglas' analysis of bodily control as an expression of social control, the article concludes that, while Annabella's ruptured body is dramatized as that of an afflicted, incestuous female, it paradoxically represents the disorder and rupture of the familial and social order.<sup>7</sup> Bringing together the interpretive conventions of the emblems and the drama of dissection in the theatres and the scaffolds of punishment, therefore, the paper further suggests that the eviscerated heart in Ford's drama can be understood as a part of a subversive strategy of the dramatist. The mutilated heart, hence, is subtly refashioned into a trope of empowerment.

Dramatic representations do not circulate independent of the cultural milieu in which they are produced. By interpreting various traditionally diverse sources: legal, scientific, psychological, political and dramatic, not as linear narratives in isolation from others but as inter-disciplinary texts of greater complexity to be read together, this paper attempted to offer a more mature interpretation of the mutilated body in Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*. The metaphors of the human body, even in the twenty-first century, continue to shape the social and political imagination, and such an inter-disciplinary approach to it challenges the ordered boundaries of medicine, sociology, politics and arts. The renewed understanding of the human body, in any age, is thus, a cumulative project.

### Notes and References

The edition used here is John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* ed. Derek Roper, Manchester, 1975.

1. Around the end of the sixteenth century, the anatomical blazons, or, descriptive poems in praise of the parts of the female body, circulated in the form of multiauthored anthologies in which each individual poet praised one or more individual part(s). Nancy Vickers elaborates on Marot's anatomical blazons and focuses on the range of body parts praised and blamed by his imitators around 1535-36, examining the radical fragmentedness of the body part in the

contemporary period (Mazzio and Hillman 3 – 21). While describing the internal strife in his own body, John Donne asks, ‘Why dost thou melt me, scatter me?’ reminding that ‘Man consists of more pieces, more parts, than the world’ (Raspa12, 19). Again, in the early modern age, there was also a proliferation of dramas featuring mutilated bodies or, even parts of the body. To cite a few instances, in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* Hieronimo self – dismembers his tongue, in *Titus Andronicus* Lavinia’s tongue and hands along with many bodies – like those of Tamora and her sons — are mutilated, in Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus* as well as *Edward II* the title characters are fatally tortured and dismembered.

2. Building on Vesalian anatomy Intersection of Various Discourses: A Study of Annabella’s heart in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* and developing a new physiology, Harvey’s revolutionary work dealt with his discovery of the circulation of the blood in the body and the function of heart as a pump.
3. Porter quotes from Harvey’s original work, in his *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity*, London: Norton, 1998, 164–169.
4. Foucault argued that the scaffold of the state functioned not only as a ‘judicial’ but also as a ‘political’ ritual in which a ‘momentarily injured sovereignty is reconstituted’ and restored ‘by manifesting it at its most spectacular’ on the body of the condemned outlaw (32–72). However, ironically, the executioner or, the anatomist or even more the dramatist, while asserting the importance of his work, endowed a new significance on the mutilated human body. Analogically then, Annabella’s body, here, gains a new liminal identity once it is perforated by Giovanni.
5. Diehl has lucidly traced the survival of the iconographic tradition in the Renaissance tragedies, like *The Spanish Tragedy* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (Diehl 1982: 198–206). However, my paper further explores how the destruction of the conventional order of things was dramatized at multiple levels – not only through the emblems, but through social and political hierarchies, and above all, through the mutilation of the human body parts.
6. I have referred to Wither’s emblem “En Dextra Fides Que” from his Collection, 230, as cited in Katherine Rowe, “Dismembering and Forgetting in *Titus Andronicus*”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (3) (Fall 1994): 292, Figure 5.
7. Douglas explains: ‘[T]he human body is always treated as an image of society and ... there can be no natural way of considering the body that does not involve at the same time a social dimension.’ Her central hypothesis remains, ‘...bodily control is an expression of social control – abandonment of bodily control in ritual responds to the requirements of a social experience which is being expressed’ (72–91).

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# **“How many people’s happiness were in his guardianship!”: A Postcolonial<sup>1</sup> Reading of the Representation of Fitzwilliam Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice***

***Kaustav Bakshi***

It's high time that the novels of Jane Austen were to be studied as powerful political texts, and the traditional view that they were apolitical and naïve was done away with. It was Edward Said who had set the ball rolling when he pointed out that Austen's *Mansfield Park* contributed to "an expanding imperialist venture" (Said 95); even before that, critics such as Avrom Flieshman and R.S. Neale had reviewed the novel as an imperialist literary work. However, Said's contrapuntal reading of the novel was much more hyped and influential. Since then, critics started taking Austen more seriously in that they began looking for signs of controversial discourses in her fiction. Maaja Stewart observes, "...the controversies surrounding [imperialism in the East and West Indies] became part of the discourses of that age that penetrated all aspects of metropolitan culture, including Austen's texts" (Stewart 2).

To quote Elleke Boehmer:

In the view of the British imperial nation, its history made up a tale of firsts; bests, and absolute beginnings. Where the British established a cross, a city, or a colony, they proclaimed the start of a new history. Other histories, by definition, were declared of lesser significance or, in certain situations, non-existent. A world-vision of this nature clearly required substantial cultural and discursive reinforcement...it was here, giving support to the imperial vision...the novel of domestic realism played a part. British writers of this time [19<sup>th</sup> Century] willy-nilly formed a part of an imperial society; they shared in the imperial antipathies and controversies of the day. Their work was imbued with, if not animated by, an awareness that a vast portion of the earth's surface was subject to Britain (Boehmer 24).

In the light of the above argument, it is interesting to reinterpret *Pride and Prejudice*; apparently, viewed as a boy-meets-girl love story, this novel subsumes within its narrative structure powerful pointers to the prevalent colonial discourse. Unlike *Mansfield Park*, that has received remarkable attention from postcolonialist critics, *Pride and Prejudice* does not make

explicit references to the British colonial enterprise. Yet, the novel by exploring themes of subjugation and control, and a woman's helplessness in the face of limited choices, gives an insight into the discourse of power and powerlessness which have affinities with socio-political order on Empire-building and conquest.

Austen's novels are set in a period in which the nationality of Great Britain had been more or less consolidated. A "ground bass" of English patriotism is easily recognized in the stories she tells. She promotes a specifically English world, as proposing in effect, that England is the world. The subliminal message of her work—English culture is culture—in effect dismisses other competitors from the field. One may recall Henry Tilney's proud assertions while reproving Catherine in *Northanger Abbey*: "Remember that we are English, that we are Christians." Austen barely ever talks about an empire overseas, but the references to tea and coffee, Indian shawl and mahogany abound in her novels.<sup>2</sup> The only explicit references are found in *Mansfield Park* and *Persuasion*. Fanny Price shows eagerness to know about the system of slavery in the West Indies while Anne Elliot keeps track of the whereabouts of the British navy. At a closer reading signs and symbols of Empire-building are found in abundance in all her novels.

In order to re-read *Pride and Prejudice* as a novel that engages with macrocosmic power structures and hegemonic discourses, I propose to re-look at Fitzwilliam Darcy, who provokes, off-sets, spurs, and finally succeeds in conquering Elizabeth Bennet, and who is eventually instrumental in securing the happiness the novel celebrates. I choose to show that Darcy is the patriarchal colonizer, and in relation to him both Elizabeth and Wickham are the Other.

To begin with, let us examine a conversation between Sir William Lucas and Darcy who indignantly surveys those engaged in dancing. Sir Lucas speaks zestfully in favour of singing and dancing: "What a charming amusement for young people this is, Mr. Darcy! — There is nothing like dancing after all. I consider it one of the first refinements of polished societies" (Austen 21). Darcy's reaction to this view is rather unsettling and reprehensible: "Certainly, Sir; — and it has the advantage also of being in vogue amongst the less polished societies of the world. — *Every savage can dance.*" (Austen 21; emphasis mine) It is interesting to note that Darcy's contempt for dancing is conditioned by the fact that it is a major form of entertainment in "the less polished societies of the world", and he believes that it is not a refinement to be proud of, as savages can *also* dance. This passing comment, though not reflected upon in the novel, is suggestive enough to look upon Darcy as a staunch believer in the cultural constructs of colonial discourse. Therefore,

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at the very outset, Darcy is almost unwittingly established as resembling the “civil” coloniser with a Eurocentric outlook.

In colonial discourse, the constructs of Self and Other are difficult to separate. Darcy here represents the civilised gentleman as against the primitive savage. In this context it is worth quoting T. Metcalf: “...as Europeans constructed a sense of self for themselves apart from the old order of Christendom, they had of necessity to create a notion of an ‘other’ beyond the seas. To describe oneself as ‘enlightened’ meant that someone else had to be shown as ‘savage’ or ‘vicious’...Such alterity, what one might call the creation of doubleness, was an integral part of the Enlightenment project” (Metcalf 6). Darcy, and therefore, by default, Austen seem to subscribe unquestioningly to this Enlightenment project. In fact, almost every European writer consciously or unconsciously endorses what J.M. Blaut calls “Eurocentric diffusionism”. As the “makers of history”, Europe “eternally advances, progresses, modernises. The rest of the world advances more sluggishly, or stagnates... Therefore, the world has a permanent geographical centre and a permanent periphery” (Blaut 1). If Darcy inhabits the centre, the ‘savage’ he refers to belongs to the periphery.

So, the savage is inferior, lacking in language, culture, and intellect. Hence, Darcy who quite naturally seems to have faith in this colonial construct, criticises dancing as no great manifestation of European culture, as it belongs to the “low” culture of the Other as well. Darcy, therefore, comes across to us as a racist, an orthodox believer in the superiority of Europe over the rest of the world. As Alastair Pennycook observes, “...in some senses, colonialism can be seen as the material manifestation of the beliefs in racial and cultural superiority” (Pennycook 38). We may note that one of the major motives behind the imperial enterprise of Europe was this unwavering faith in its superiority; and as A. Memmi points out, racism is

the highest expression of the colonial system and one of the most significant features of the colonialist. Not only does it establish a fundamental discrimination between the colonizer and the colonized... but it also lays the foundation for the immutability of this life (Memmi 74).

That one not-quite-well-thought-out comment, “Every savage can dance”, which inevitably shows the savage as culturally inferior, establishes the speaker as a racist, and strengthens our argument that though Austen rarely speaks of the Empire overseas, her novels can be read as by-products of colonial discourse. Said says,

How do writers in the period before the great age of explicit, programmatic colonial expansion — the ‘scramble for Africa’, say

— situate and see themselves and their work in the larger world? We shall find them using striking but careful strategies, many of them derived from expected sources — positive ideas of home, of a nation and its language, of proper order, good behaviour, moral values... (Said 97).

Austen is one such writer.

Manners and morals, in short, propriety, play a central role in Austen's novels. *Pride and Prejudice* is no exception, and an implicit assumption is that individuals ought to adhere to propriety. Said, while analysing *Mansfield Park*, observes: "More clearly than anywhere else in her fiction, Austen here synchronizes the domestic with international authority, making it plain that values associated with such higher things as ordination, law and propriety must be grounded firmly in actual rule over and possession of territory" (Said 104). Though this synchronization is not so obvious in *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's consistent thrust on the proper regard for propriety all through the novel is suggestive enough to validate Said's observation. Darcy is portrayed almost as a vanguard of the ideals of propriety, and those, namely Lydia and Wickham, who fail to abide by the rules of morality, are actually "rescued" by him.

If Darcy is an approximately close representation of the prototype colonial master, it would be interesting to note his take on propriety and moral values. When Elizabeth accuses him of separating Bingley and Jane, Darcy quite plainly explains to her that he discouraged Bingley from marrying Jane, precisely because her family lacks any sense of propriety: "The situation of your mother's family, though objectionable was nothing in comparison of the total want of propriety so frequently, so uniformly betrayed by herself, by your three younger sisters, and occasionally even by your father" (Austen 176). Disregard for propriety is absolutely repugnant to Darcy, and this establishes him as a true master exhibiting the values associated with the image of the imperialist as constructed by the colonial discourse.

The novel supports Darcy in the sense that it shows characters failing to live up to the ideals of propriety as unhappy or driven astray. The most striking example would be Lydia. Austen describes her as unguarded and uncivil. Her total disregard for the rules of propriety results in her living together with Wickham who has not married her. She unthinkingly ignores propriety and morality for the purpose of fulfilling her personal desires. Wickham, on the other hand, is shown in an unfavourable light as his manners are superficially polished and gentlemanlike. That Wickham has no sense of propriety is evident from his very first conversation with Elizabeth whereby he cuts an extremely offensive picture of Darcy, who incidentally is the son of his benefactor.

It is Darcy who has to bear the burden of rescuing both Lydia and Wickham.

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Mrs. Gardiner writes to Elizabeth how Darcy compels Wickham to marry Lydia, and how he takes care of his debts. Elizabeth’s reaction is noteworthy:

Oh! How heartily she grieved over every ungracious sensation she had ever encouraged, every saucy speech she ever directed towards him. For herself she was humbled; but she was proud of him (Austen 289).

The process of final conquest has begun. However, I shall come back to this a little later.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that Darcy by disrupting Wickham’s plans of eloping with Georgiana, in “delivering” Wickham and Lydia, and thereby saving the Bennet family from disgrace, exhibits the qualities of the White Man as enumerated by Rudyard Kipling. Colonized people were seen as immoral; and in the act of rescuing Lydia and Wickham, Darcy fulfills the duty of the Eurocentric colonial master. It is worth quoting Frantz Fanon in this context:

Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is absolute evil (Fanon 32).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Lydia and Wickham act as the counterparts of the natives the Europeans sought to deliver. Once Wickham is exposed, everybody feels repulsed by him: “All Meryton seemed striving to *blacken* the man, who, but three months, had been almost an angel of light... Everybody declared that he was the wickedest man in the world” (Austen 260; emphasis mine). We may note that the word “blacken” used in connection to Wickham becomes loaded with meaning in colonial discourse analysis.

In the letter that Darcy writes to Elizabeth, he says: “I knew that Mr. Wickham ought not to be a clergyman...He resigned all claim to assistance in the church...He had found the law a most unprofitable study...” (Austen 179). Wickham’s breaking off from the church and his contempt for law have a special significance in a contrapuntal reading of *Pride and Prejudice*. The colonial masters had tremendous pride in Christendom, and one of the basic aims of colonization was to convert the heathens into Christians. Lord John Russel had declaimed that colonization was motivated by the noble task of letting the subjects “partake the blessings of Christianity” (qtd. in Morris 37-38). Mostly, the British saw themselves as performing a divine duty in

colonizing those who were pagan. Therefore, Wickham's giving up the profession of a clergy is looked upon as heretical, and it inexorably links him up with the pagan savage to whom the light of civilization had to be carried. Again his disregard for law is also culpable, for law is one of the most important institutions which were held in high esteem by the Europeans. Wickham thereby comes across as un-European in different ways, and therefore, he is, inevitably, the villain of *Pride and Prejudice* in the true sense of the term. Darcy the lawful good Christian, in contrast to Wickham, is therefore the hero.

We may also take into account that in colonial discourse, a sexual division of the "other" into rapist and virgin is quite common. Darcy as the father-figure should have in his power the capacity to regulate the sexuality of his subjects — Wickham and Georgiana. The promise of civilization is aligned with the preservation of virginity. Georgiana must be protected from the rapist, the lustful Wickham. In disrupting Wickham's wicked design of ravishing Georgiana and later by compelling him to marry Lydia, Darcy reconfirms his stand as the civil master.

In fact, Darcy is also instrumental in saving Elizabeth from being seduced by Wickham. Elizabeth's reflection on her initial judgement of Wickham and Darcy, after reading Darcy's letter is noteworthy:

How humiliating is this discovery! — Yet, how just a humiliation!  
 — Had I been in love, I could not have been more wretchedly blind. But vanity, not love, has been my folly. Pleased with the preference of one, and offended by the neglect of the other, on the very beginning of our acquaintance, I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven *reason* away, where either was concerned. Till this moment, I never knew myself (Austen 285; emphasis mine).

What immediately strikes us is that Elizabeth ostensibly links her preference for Wickham and abhorrence for Darcy with her irrationality. She professes to have acted on instincts. Rationality/intellect versus irrationality/instinct is one of the several dichotomies that were typical of diffusionist thought; the first characteristic in the pair belonging to the Europeans, the second to the non-Europeans.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the necessity of being rational is established as absolutely important to differentiate between the "civil" lover (Darcy) and the "barbaric" seducer (Wickham).

The emphasis on the importance of Reason, inevitably, reveals Austen's belief in the hegemonic liberal humanist project called the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment project emphasised on Reason and Progress that stemmed from the Western mind. In fact, the construction of the Other as the child as against

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the European as the adult has affinities with the concept of rationality. Ashis Nandy cites Philippe Aries who argues that in the seventeenth century, a new concept of childhood emerged in Europe. The child was seen as the inferior version of the adult who had to be educated.

It increasingly looked like a blank slate on which adults must write their moral codes—an inferior version of maturity, less productive and ethical, and badly contaminated by the playful, irresponsible and spontaneous aspects of human nature...Exploitation of children in the name of putting them to productive work, which took place in the early days of the Industrial Revolution in Britain, was a natural corollary of such a concept of childhood...Colonialism dutifully picked up these ideas of growth and development and drew a new parallel between primitivism and childhood (Nandy 15).

In connection to the above argument, it is worthwhile to mention that a number of critics choose to read *Pride and Prejudice* as a bildungsroman: Elizabeth’s development into a mature individual, who learns to act rationally rather than instinctively. This development that involves a journey from ignorance to knowledge ensures her a happy life ever after. This may be read as Austen’s endorsement of the Enlightenment legacy, the sense that European rationality holds out the possibility of improvement for all humanity. This in turn exposes Austen to the criticism of postcolonial critics, such as Said, who review the Enlightenment project as having a concealed agenda of setting up a convincing imperial practice. If the rest of the world was made to believe in a superior set of human laws, imperialism could flourish without any impediment.<sup>4</sup>

*Pride and Prejudice*, therefore, exhibits a plethora of cultural constructs of the colonial discourse, though it seems to be complacently rooted in the domestic realities of a plush green English countryside immune to the politics of the greater world beyond it. Having analyzed quite a few of these constructs embedded in the narrative, an examination of the Elizabeth-Darcy relationship becomes essential. The novel dramatises, in effect, the colonization of Elizabeth by Darcy. Elizabeth’s desperation to preserve her individuality in the face of such colonization is a significant aspect of Austen’s art. Nonetheless, what stands out is a woman’s helplessness in a world of limited choices where liberation for them is synonymous to being conquered by a competent civil lover.

Ashis Nandy observes,

...the experience of colonizing did not leave the internal culture of Britain untouched. It began to bring into prominence those parts of the British political culture which were least tender and humane.

It de-emphasized speculation, intellection and *caritas* as feminine, and justified a limited cultural role for women — and femininity — by holding that the softer side of human nature was irrelevant to the public sphere... The tragedy of colonialism was also the tragedy of the young sons, the women, and all ‘the etceteras and and-so-forths’ of Britain (Nandy 32).

Though Nandy is talking about a time when the British imperial enterprise was at its height in India (post- 1857), Austen’s novel written almost half-a-century ago, contains within it a poignant picture of the tragedy of the women, treated as decorative and irrational.

While at home, women were being constructed as irrational, fragile, timid, and frail, the Other was also constructed as “feminine” by the colonial masters. Darcy’s love-hate relationship with Elizabeth Bennet has affinities with the relationship between the colonial master and colonial subject as constructed by the Eurocentric discourse of colonialism:

The homology between sexual and political dominance which Western colonialism invariably used...was not an accidental by-product of colonial history...The homology, drawing support from the denial of psychological bisexuality in men in large areas of western culture, beautifully legitimised Europe’s post-medieval models of dominance, exploitation and cruelty as natural and valid. Colonialism too, was congruent with the existing Western sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented. It produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity (Nandy 4).

Contrary to expectations, from the very beginning Elizabeth puts up a strong resistance against the construction of women as propagated by the conduct books. Elizabeth’s non-conformity to the rules set by the conduct books or the image of the social stereotype of the weak and angelic woman, can be read as a resistance she puts up against being taken for granted, given her doubly marginalised position as a woman of no property. In this, Elizabeth resembles the colonised subject who felt the need for cultural resistance to counter the Eurocentric constructions of the Other.

Her rejection of Collins leaves the latter flabbergasted, for he believes that she is in no position to turn down his proposal. Though Darcy is much more sensible, intelligent, and sophisticated than Collins, his reaction to Elizabeth’s opposition is not very different from Collins’. Both the men are taken aback by the boldness of an economically handicapped woman apparently incapable of turning down potential marriage proposals. Elizabeth’s resistance to conform

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to the established concept of a woman, and her desperation to keep alive her individuality, separates her from a lot of other women in the novel, women who have unquestioningly internalized the myth that they are born to play second fiddle to men. Even Elizabeth’s daring encounter with Lady Catherine who shamelessly tries to dissuade her from marrying Darcy is highly commendable. When Lady Catherine points out to her that given her middle class status, she cannot marry Darcy, Elizabeth tells her: “He is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (Austen 316).

Lady Catherine and the two men, especially Collins, try to impose their authority on Elizabeth. Elizabeth’s resistance threatens to disrupt the hierarchy of authority. In fact, it is important to note how Elizabeth ponders over Darcy’s voluntary involvement in saving Lydia’s honour: “It was painful, exceedingly painful, to know that they were under the obligations to a person who could never receive a return” (Austen 289). Darcy’s interference in the Lydia-Wickham affair saves the Bennet family from ruin. In this Darcy exhibits one of the many qualities attributed to the paternal colonial master. Elizabeth feels uneasy that they have to remain grateful to Darcy, and they are thoroughly incapable of returning his favours. The pain she feels intensifies the resistance she puts up against authoritative control of the upper class patriarch. What unsettles us is the compromise that Austen makes towards the end of the novel. We witness with a lot of discomfort how Elizabeth’s resistance gradually weakens and she submits to Darcy. No matter, how ashamed Darcy feels for his impoliteness or believes himself to be “properly humbled” (Austen 328) by Elizabeth, I still choose to read Darcy’s tying the knot with Elizabeth as a conquest, accomplished as it were, by the consent of the conquered.

In this context, it is useful to quote Leela Gandhi who comprehensively summarizes the relationship between postcolonial and feminist theory:

Both bodies of thought have concerned themselves with the study and defence of the marginalised ‘Other’ within repressive structures of domination and, in so doing, both have followed a remarkably similar theoretical trajectory. Feminist and postcolonial theory alike began with an attempt to simply invert prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race, and they have each progressively welcomed the poststructuralist invitation to refuse the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal/colonial authority constructs itself (Gandhi 82-83).

In the light of the above quotation, it would be interesting to reconsider Elizabeth’s sorrowful realization that she is helplessly dependent on Darcy. We may recall that the European colonial discourse had strengthened itself through several popular stories of the benevolent colonial master and the

“grateful Negro”. Many well-known plantation tales during Austen’s lifetime that depict the “grateful Negro” encourage planters to improve the conditions on their plantations. The slaves, in return, will be obliged to respond with loyalty and gratitude, which in turn will remarkably stabilize the planters’ assets from within the ranks of the subjugated. Winning the gratitude of the colonised was a potent trope in the colonial discourse. That gratitude paves the path for complete domination is recognized by Elizabeth. Yet, she gradually consents to the domination, helpless as she is in a society that scarcely provides her with any respectable option of complete liberation.

Elizabeth’s submission to Darcy is catalyzed by the letter Darcy writes to her in his self-defence. The letter clearly shows Darcy’s paternal sway over everybody, the moral control he exercises over his friend Bingley and his sister Georgiana. His sense of judgement that Elizabeth initially saw as seriously flawed, is also established as impeccable, as she realizes that his judgement of Jane was totally “impartial”. Elizabeth thereby begins to see Darcy in a more favourable light. That she too is in need of a paternal figure to fall back on is confirmed a little later. When she receives the news that Lydia has eloped with Wickham, she is infinitely perturbed, for she knows that there is no one in the family she can rely on to get her sister back: “She was wild to be at home — to hear, to see, to be upon the spot, the share with Jane in the cares that now must fall wholly upon her, in a family so deranged; a father absent, a mother incapable of exertion, and requiring constant attendance” (Austen 247).

Darcy’s interference in this matter, and the solution he provides to the crisis, inevitably establishes him as the fatherly figure whose absence Elizabeth regrets. However, it is important to note here, that the process of conquest had already begun, especially with Elizabeth’s visit to Pemberley. Darcy’s image as a domestic counterpart of the paternal colonial master abroad is perhaps best confirmed in the first chapter of the third volume — Elizabeth’s arrival at Pemberley.

Pemberley, in a way, comes to symbolise Darcy’s civil largesse. The descriptions of Pemberley Park and Pemberley House link them to something heavenly. Elizabeth is seduced by the sight to sigh remorsefully that she had rejected Darcy’s proposal: “...at that moment she felt, that to be the mistress of Pemberley might be something!” (Austen 215). The detailed description of Pemberley, its pomp and grandeur, is imperative to underline the superiority of Darcy, his tastes and manners. In fact, Pemberley is represented as an absolute contrast to Longbourn..

In this context, it would not be incorrect to quote Elleke Boehmer who while analyzing nineteenth century European fiction observes:

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Not surprisingly, important signifiers for imperial values were laid down in the novel’s representation of space—the focus on certain areas and not on others, the attention given to the capital in relation to its outlying areas. Social hierarchy, in other words, was symbolized geographically. Status usually hinged on proximity to the imperial centre, though the significance of place as property complicated and often reinforced the hierarchy (Boehmer 25).

Austen, quite clearly, gives more importance to Pemberley (as evidenced by her long meticulous description of the place) than she gives to Longbourn. Pemberley is Darcy’s residence, and therefore, it may be identified with the “imperial centre”, and Elizabeth’s final movement from the margins as represented by Longbourn to Pemberley, secures for her permanent joy. This movement is in keeping with the structure of the bildungsroman that involves a journey of its protagonist from the margin to the centre.

However, Elizabeth has to go through a lot of emotional turbulence before she finally decides in favour of accepting Darcy; and her final decision is considerably conditioned by her visit to Pemberley, and her meeting with Mrs. Reynolds, the housekeeper. Mrs. Reynolds represents Darcy as a worthy master, an ideal paternalist:

He is the best landlord, and the best master...that ever lived. Not like the wild young men now-a-days, who think of nothing but themselves. There is not one of his tenants or servants but what will give him a good name (Austen 219).

Interestingly, Darcy is described in terms of his relationship to all his dependants. Elizabeth carefully dissects Mrs. Reynolds’ representation of Darcy:

What praise is more valuable than the praise of an intelligent servant? As a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness were in his guardianship! — How much pleasure or pain it was in his power to bestow? How much good or evil must be done by him? (Austen 220)

Elizabeth is soon to belong to the group indebted to him for his benevolence. In the absence of a competent patriarchal figure at home, she is presently “masterless”. She should, therefore; be brought under Darcy’s control, the perfect master, the model beneficiary, the saviour. And as she gazes at his portrait, “she thought of his regard with a *deeper sentiment of gratitude* than it had ever raised before” (Austen 220; emphasis mine).

Though *Pride and Prejudice* is famously an anti-aristocratic satire, Darcy’s representation in the final chapters of the novel turns out to be “a celebration

of the ethos of the hereditary landed gentleman who is clearly at the apex of the social pyramid" (Bhatt 106). Darcy does not only enjoy the exclusive power of doing "good or evil" to or of bestowing "pleasure or pain" on his subordinates, he wields extraordinary power in controlling their sense of judgement as well. This is best observed in his relationship with his sister Georgiana: Because he creates an agreeable picture of Elizabeth, poor Georgiana does not have in her power even to *think* of her otherwise: "...his judgement cannot err, and he had spoken in such terms of Elizabeth, as to leave Georgiana without the power of finding her otherwise than lovely and amiable" (Austen 238). True, that Elizabeth's friendly manners and caring nature do not allow Georgiana to find her "otherwise"; but that's a different issue altogether. Georgiana's willing submission to Darcy and her blind faith in his sense of judgement are important indicators of his absolute power.

The novel ends with the happy union of Darcy and Elizabeth, and Austen seems to advance the model of a companionate marriage. Yet, as Sharmila Bhatt points out,

A trace of the stereotype however continues to linger in the function the narrator accords to each: the 'judgement and knowledge of the world' must come from him whereas 'the ease and liveliness of manner' to soften Darcy's mind are to be supplied by Elizabeth (Bhatt 108).

The basic inequalities do loom large at the back of the apparently companionate marriage, though Elizabeth's wit and ironic vision retain a subversive potential. What seems to matter most at the close of the novel is the maintenance of hierarchy of classes and the preservation of the social fabric. Darcy's tiny empire is thus established; his power over it is confirmed.

Edward W. Said is in complete agreement with Raymond Williams who holds that in general Austen's novels express an attainable quality of life, in the acquisition of money and property, in making moral discriminations, in the exercise of right choices, and the implementation of correct improvements.<sup>5</sup> The representation of Darcy as an ideal paternal figure and his successful conquest of Elizabeth, the emphasis that is laid on Reason, the weight that is attached to the concept of "propriety", the importance that is attributed to the maintenance of social hierarchy, and a consciousness that English culture is remarkably superior that runs like an undercurrent throughout the novel are all commensurate with the process of the formation of an English nationality, the expansion of nationality being synonymous to imperialism. It was a time when England and a large number of European countries were preparing themselves to play "guardian" to the Orientalist Other, and in doing so, were in the process of constructing for the Other a credible, reliable image of

“How many people’s happiness were in his guardianship!”

themselves. And *Pride and Prejudice*, written during the last decade of the eighteenth century and published in 1813, while narrating a simple tale of an emotional contest between two proud and prejudiced lovers, almost effortlessly subsumes in its narrative structure the “rhetoric of empire.”

## Notes and References

1. The term “postcolonial” is highly problematic. Although the era of direct colonialism is over, neo-colonialist or imperialist practices have replaced it in the contemporary world. Neo-colonialism is more subtle, yet profound. We have not been able to do away with the colonial, if colonialism connotes a way of maintaining an unequal international relation of economic and political power. My analysis belongs to the academic area of inquiry which was founded by Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978 —— colonial discourse, also referred to as colonial discourse theory. See Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, “Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: An Introduction” in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds.) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (London, New York, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, and Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 1–18.
2. For a more detailed analysis see John Wiltshire, “Jane Austen’s England, Jane Austen’s World”, in *Jane Austen: Introductions and Interventions* (New Delhi: Macmillan, 2003), 108-120.
3. See Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World*, 17.
4. See Leela Gandhi, “Thinking otherwise: a brief intellectual history”, in *Postcolonial Theory: a Critical Introduction* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23-41; Shelley Walia, *Edward Said and the Writing of History*, Postmodern Encounter Series, (New Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2005), 36-37.
5. See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 95-116.

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# Egdonism Versus Vyeism, and the Authorial Indeterminacy in Hardy's *The Return of the Native*

*Sisir Kumar Chatterjee*

Hardy's valorisation of Egdon Heath in the very first chapter of his novel *The Return of the Native* – particularly, his obvious stress on the formidably awesome grandeur of the place fraught with obtrusive suggestions of relentless, sinister and destructive associations – is likely to lead one to conclude that Egdon is much more than a place: it is an externalisation of Hardy's internalised perception of the Darwinistic theory of environmental determinism.<sup>1</sup> Egdon defies Time. It has “A Face on Which Time Makes But Little Impression”. It does not allow time to work upon it. Rather, it responds to time according to its own sullen will

The face of the heath...added half an hour to evening; it could...retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread (Hardy 2).

Likewise, it negates Civilisation (“Civilization was its enemy”). It has reduced the Celtic architecture built up on it to mounds of graves. It has killed two of Wildeve's men who sought to ravish it: “ The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of the labour: the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it.” (Ibid 28-9) Egdon is thus projected as a hegemonic agency which interferes in human affairs, but does not allow any human interference in its own affairs.

The most significant, and perhaps the only one, character in the novel to dare to defy this Darwinistic don is Eustacia Vye. Her larger-than-life size portrait makes her a professed adversary of Egdon. That she is mentally locked and also blocked in a “struggle” with this formidable force is expressed by herself with candid words intoned in a stressful and gnawing perturbation and a visceral feeling of annoyance and gut resistance: “ ‘tis my cross, my shame, and will be my death.” (Ibid 69) Her life here is a veritable state of forced exile, and perhaps Eustacia Vye, displaced from Budmouth, a fashionable seaside resort, is one of the earliest paradigms of immigrant, diasporic entity, exiled in a space to which she cannot belong, and therefore continuously seeking an escape route through it to Paris and the life that it stands for, as the narrator remarks: “She hated the change; she felt like one banished; but here [in Egdon] she was forced to abide” (Ibid 55) When Clym tries to sober her down by suggesting: “There is no use in hating people – if you hate

anything, you should hate what produced them", Eustacia snaps: " Do you mean Nature? I hate her already...I cannot endure the heath...The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me." (Ibid147) In fact, the narrator himself points to the mutual animosity and unbridgeable polarity between Egdon and Eustacia Vye when he remarks: "Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto." (Ibid 54) In short, if Egdon demands acquiescence, that is, Darwinistic adaptability, Eustacia Vye is rebellion incarnate.

Indeed, *The Return of the Native* can be read as a fictionalisation of Darwinism. The text itself lends support to this way of reading the book. For instance, emphasis on transitionality, which is crucial to Darwin's thesis, is also pervasive in Hardy's book. To cite one example, in the very first chapter, Egdon is said to reveal its true glory at the "*transitional* [italics added] point of its nightly roll into darkness" (Ibid 2). Again, in the very next chapter, the Reddleman (Diggory Venn) is described as "a curious, interesting, and nearly perished *link* (emphasis added) between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail" (Ibid 6). Even the horses of Venn, pulling the spring van carrying Thomasin, are categorized as "a breed *between* (italics added) Galloway and Exmoor" (Ibid.7). To cite another instance of the novel's Darwinist subtext, suggested autonomously or with deliberate authorial intention, the interplay between man and his environment is subtly hinted in the very first chapter with the narrator's reference to "pickaxe, plough, or spade", which are evidently the instruments used by man at a later stage of civilisation to modify his environment. The text also draws our attention in the very next chapter with the overt suggestion of Eustacia Vye, who represents humanity (the title of this chapter is "Humanity appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble"), surmounting the heath, as her figure "rose from the semi-globular mound like a spike from a helmet", and as the narrator states: "Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure [of Eustacia Vye]" (Ibid 9). Quite significantly, the first gesture of Eustacia Vye highlighted by the narrative is that of mobility, which obviously tends to counteract the "immobility" of the heath. What is more, Diggory Venn feels drawn to her as "more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing" than the new-comers who replace her. Even the order in which these newcomers are seen to march in trail seems to have been dictated, quite Darwinistically, by Nature's rule of selectional priority reminding us of the theory of "the survival of the fittest", a phrase that Darwin had adopted from Herbert Spencer — "the strongest first, the weak and young behind." (Ibid 10) .

Thus, *The Return of the Native* may be legitimately read as a fictional

enactment of the theory of the "Struggle for Existence" schematised in the form of a mutual hostility between a domineering, authoritative adverse agency and a blatantly defiant individual of the species called Homosapiens. If Egdon becomes an emissary of Darwin's theory of "Natural Selection", Eustacia, with her passion for Paris and her eagerness to escape from Egdon, emblemises the necessity of "Human Selection", to imply the message that man must seek to assert his existence by selecting the environment which he feels is favourable to him. It is certainly interesting to note that "Nature, according to Darwin, was the product of blind chance and a blind struggle, and man a lonely, intelligent mutation" (Darwin 43) struggling for existence. Eustacia Vye's death, whether it is a suicide or it is an accident, within this narrative scheme, may tempt one to conclude that Hardy in this novel shows Nature eliminating an individual member of a species because she was a creature of "injurious variations" (Ibid 131), that it ends with the privileging of Egdonism over Vyeism. But, the scale of opinion may tilt in favour of a diametrically opposite view of the triumph of Vyeism over Egdonism, when one perceives the extent of the author's imaginative extension to sympathise with the rebellious heroine. No reader can overlook the profound authorial empathy revealed in the appreciative evaluation of Eustacia's death, which is claimed to have "eclipsed all her living phases", and in the broad humanistic gesture of infusing life into her dead body: "The expression of her finely carved mouth was pleasant, as if a sense of dignity had just compelled her to leave off speaking. Eternal rigidity had seized upon it in a momentary transition between fervour and resignation....The stateliness of look which had been almost too marked for a dweller in a country domicile had at last found an artistically happy background." (Hardy 293). In fact, the narrative style, throughout the book — both at broad structural as well as minute, textural levels — is so pervasively fraught with authorial indeterminacy that it would be rash to draw any conclusion at all.

It is difficult to fail to notice the element of indeterminacy that tends to mould the structuration of the plot of the book. The novel begins with the story of an intended marriage thwarted. Wildeve fails to marry Thomasin. He comes back to his former half fiancé Eustacia Vye. Diggory Venn overhears a conversation between the two secret lovers. He offers to marry Thomasin, and puts his proposal before Mrs. Yeobright. The elderly lady disapproves of this proposed match, but proceeds to use it as a means to put psychological pressure on Wildeve by placing the latter in a competitive situation. She asks him to let Thomasin know that he does not any longer want to marry her, which, the lady argues, will "pique her into accepting" her new suitor. Wildeve seeks time to consider the matter. With his injured male ego, he comes back

to Eustacia, and requests her to marry him, with the lure that he will take her to America. She wants time to decide. Meanwhile Clym returns. Eustacia sees a better prospect in him. She ensnares him. Clym marries her, against his mother's wish. Wildeve turns again to Thomasin, and marries her. Eustacia becomes disillusioned when she comes to learn that Clym has no intention to go back to Paris. She turns again to Wildeve, and half wishes to use him as a means of her escape from Egdon. But both of them die in the attempt. Thus, the plot of *The Return of the Native* seems to have been worked out on the principle of difference, as it veers with a tense uncertainty in a whirlpool of criss-crossing pulls and shifting counter-pulls of passion from one angle of a complex relational pentagon to the other so that the consummation continues to be deferred and keeps on differing from the reader's expectations. And the five major characters involved in the love pentagon become entangled in a passionate game of intra-species struggle for existence, a game of what Darwin calls "Sexual Selection", "a struggle between the males for possession of the females" (Darwin 136), and, it may be added, a struggle between the females for possession of the males.

However, Egdon may have killed Eustacia Vye, but it cannot miniaturise her. Egdon has checked her desired immigration, but it is her Promethean spirit of persistent defiance that looms larger than the monstrosity of "the vast tract of unenclosed wild". (Hardy 2) What affects the readers is the author's implicit act of celebrating the inviolable dignity of man encapsulated in the tragic grandeur of Vye's death, which results from her refusal to conform to the demands of the environment. One may legitimately claim that her tragedy dwarfs the agent that caused it, for all tragedies involve either loss or termination of human potentialities, and there is glory in a defeat that is free from the ignominy of acquiescence. It is true that all of man's efforts since the beginning of civilisation to modify his environment have ultimately ended in cataclysmic situations. So, the inevitable consequence of the defiance of or tampering with the environment is tragedy. And yet the paradox is that the very birth and furtherance of civilisation has resulted from and does depend on man's capacity to modify his environment. If everyone adapts to his environment for fear of extinction, and nobody rebels against the adversity of Nature or seeks to modify her, then civilisation will cease to advance. Therefore, the grandeur of Vye's catastrophic end lies in her refusal to acquiesce in what Egdon tends to impose upon her like a coloniser. Diggory Venn and Thomasin will undoubtedly leave progeny, but their descendants can only be expected to inherit the meekness and the spirit of conformity of their parents, and to join the band of Hardy-esque rustics, the human commonplaces, only of a slightly superior breed. Clym, who strives to strike

a balance between a comfortable conformity to and a safe attempt at modification of his environment, when compared with Eustacia, impresses us at best as a representative of the loyalist middle class bourgeois, notorious in all times and places for its spirit of compromise. It is true that the novel ends with Clym standing where Eustacia at the beginning stood. But, the hero's handicapped survival (Clym's partial blindness may be metaphoric) pales into an unheroic and somewhat undignified existence when contrasted with the physical elimination of Vye, whose life attained glory of invincibility through her death, which in the fictional scheme is the climax of defiance.

Thus, if one reads *The Return of the Native* as an enactment of the theory of Social Darwinism, which was certainly a shaping influence on the late nineteenth-century milieu in England, Egdon may be regarded as a metaphor for the social system and the community, and Eustacia as one of those pioneering militants who, as D. H. Lawrence, in his minority, idiosyncratic but brilliant view expressed in his "Study of Thomas Hardy" writes, "find themselves up against the established system of human government and morality." (Lawrence 420) Eustacia fails to escape from this system literally. But, her death becomes a metaphoric escape "for free action, after having left the walled security, and the comparative imprisonment, of the established convention." (Ibid 411) A Hardyesque rebellious and tragic protagonist, according to Lawrence, breaks the bounds of the community, to "stand alone, and say: 'I was right, my desire was real and inevitable; if I was to be myself I must fulfil it, convention or no convention,' or else, ...[to keep on] doubting, and saying: 'Was I right, was I wrong? If I was wrong, oh, let me die!' — in which case [s]he courts death." (Ibid 411-12) This applies perfectly to Eustacia Vye, for with her death a chance of life is lost. The narrative trajectory of her life becomes an inspiring ideal for innumerable potential progeny amongst the contemporaries and the posterity of Hardy's readers, all cherishing the ideal of rebellion or resistance or defiance, which has been the secret of the inestimable stature of all the heroic figures in literature.

No one will dispute that there is an unmistakable element of ambivalence<sup>2</sup> in Hardy's attitudes to both Egdon Heath and Eustacia Vye as well as to the conflict between these two power blocks. The author not only underscores the sinister associations of Egdon (it is linked with "darkness", "night", "black"-ness, and "storm" and projected as an "untameable", implacable elemental entity) but also draws our attention to its inherent, semi-mystic beauty revealed through the depiction of its reciprocal fraternization with the entire elemental world in a language couched in a discernibly appreciative cadence. It is "majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity." (Hardy 3) It is "Haggard" but not without

a “level of gaiety”. No one can deny the author’s feelingful indeterminacy when he observes, quite mystically, that “It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen” (Ibid 2) The perception of the true spirit of Egdon demands, the authorial observation here implies, a “negative capability”, a sensibility to remain in doubts, mysteries and uncertainties. If one sentence embodies the heath’s poetic, romantic sensibility: “The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen” (Ibid 3), the very next that begins with the promise of the continuation of this romantic mood lapses into an apocalyptic suggestion: “Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis — the final overthrow.” (Ibid.3) Hardy’s depiction of Egdon, in short, is both inanimistic (which is quite in keeping with Darwin’s view of Nature) and animistic (which is anti-Darwinistic).

The same aporetic expansiveness characterises Hardy’s portraiture of Eustacia Vye too. Interestingly enough, the author’s intention to portray Eustacia Vye as an opponent of Egdon is betrayed in his strategic act of associating the lady with darkness. She is described as the “Queen of Night”. She is capable of showing contrary moods, “the captious alteration of caresses and blows.” “She had Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries” which “enabled her to indulge in reverie without seeming to do so”, and her “mouth seemed formed less to speak than to quiver, less to quiver than to kiss...less to kiss than to curl.” (Ibid 53) The authorial anxiety in the portrayal of the lady assumes a polyvalent dimension when it is observed that “the shady splendour of her beauty was the real surface of the sad and stifled warmth within her.” Again, “she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than for any particular lover.” (Ibid 56) And yet, as she herself perceives and admits, “Love is the dismallest thing where the lover is quite honest.” (Ibid 67) No reader can miss the element of liminality in the following authorial comment about the lady: “... she had sung without being merry, possessed without enjoying, outshone without triumphing.” (Ibid 56) She is aware that Wildeve is not “worthy of” her, and yet she professes her love for him. She can discern “a sort of beauty in the scenery [of Egdon]” and yet considers it to be “a jail” to her. (Ibid 75). Instances of the narratorial ambivalence can be almost limitless. It would be better to stop by summing up that Eustacia Vye is both a victim of natural paradoxes and contradictions, and an untiring seeker of an ideal that remains ultimately unattainable. The narrational indeterminacy is also corroborated by the originally intended, open-ended close of the novel, the present happy ending being simply a measure of the author’s compromise with the demands of the contemporary audience.

All this clearly suggests the author's stance of narrative non-committality. It indicates that he refused to extend his unstinted sanction to either Egdonism or Vyeism, to Darwinism<sup>3</sup> or to any force of life that refused to be daunted by a hostile environment, that he chose to leave space for the readers to appreciate the narrative liminality, so that he could accommodate and adumbrate the socio-cultural, philosophical and scientific developments in the world of futurity. As a literary artist writing in a crucially transitional period, Hardy, the first modernist, had to base his art on the tradition of realistic fiction<sup>4</sup>, while at the same time he felt a conscientious need to usher in some changes into this convention of writing. These conflicting authorial stances, therefore, may be interpreted as serving to reveal how Hardy was groping for a comprehensive system or pattern of thought that "would adequately explain" the mysteries of this world by reconciling "the scientific view of life with the emotional and the spiritual." (Kundu Preface) This is asserted to reiterate the simple truism that all great works of art originate in and are indeed inextricably bound up with a specific context, but their textual autonomy tends to create a discourse which contests and transcends the context, foreshadows the time to come and yields itself to a deconstructive operation so that the readers can leave their contribution to the process of enriching its import. Thus, Hardy's *The Return of the Native* is undoubtedly one of those classics "that reward each reading with a new sense of themselves, a new sense of ourselves, and a new sense of mystery" (Harkness 7).

### Notes and References

1. Darwin's epoch-making book *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection* contributed to the augmentation of complexity of the intellectual and philosophical ferment of the Victorian milieu. Darwin's theory embodied in *The Origin* had shaken the foundation of the traditional beliefs of the fixity of the species, of natural theology and of the Rational Christianity which was willing to concede to the fact of "evolution" only with the discount of the claim that it was purposive, for the orthodox view was based on the conception that the world was created and the creatures were judiciously distributed in this planet by a benevolent, omnipotent and superintending Being. Darwin's book established the theory of the "Struggle for Existence" and of "Natural Selection", that is, the preservation by the environment of specially well adapted variations. Darwin argues that Nature selects the species with "favourable variations" and eliminates those with "injurious variations", for the latter are "unfit" as they lack in adaptability, and therefore, they will not contribute to the process of speciation, that is, the creation of a different species of progeny.
2. It is curious to note that Darwin himself till the end of his life had been in an intellectual state of indeterminacy. As J.W. Burrow records, "By the time he came to write *The Origin*, he [Darwin] had lost all orthodox belief and come

to the conclusion, which he retained to the end of his life, that questions of ultimate causes and purposes were an insoluble mystery." (See J. W. Burrow's "Introduction" to *The Origin of Species*. "Editor's Introduction", Charles, Darwin. *The Origin of Species By Means of Natural Selection*. p.24.) Even more curious is the deconstructivistically ironic fact that Darwin "seemed destined to become yet another botanizing Victorian clergyman", but from this fate "he was rescued by an accident which seems almost to have been sent by providence...for from it was to spring the work which ...has shaken men's belief in the immediate providential superintendence of human affairs": In 1831 H.M.S. *Beagle*, commissioned by the Admiralty to make a surveying voyage in the southern hemisphere, was in need of a naturalist, and J. S. Henslow, the Professor of Botany, recommended Darwin, who, after obtaining his father's consent with some difficulty, accepted. Thus he was to be away for five years, and his experience during this long period of surveying journey led him to write *The Origin of Species*. (Ibid 24-5)

3. Hardy's biography, of course, hints how profoundly he was affected by Darwin's theory. "As a young man", according to Mrs. Hardy, Thomas Hardy "had been among the earliest acquirers of *The Origin of Species*." (See F. E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* p.153). His study of *Essays and Reviews* published in 1860 had the effect of "impressing him much." (Ibid 33)
4. "Traditionally realism", as George Levine argues, "is associated with determinism" and a realistic novel presents at its centre "The single character [who] is implicated in a world of the contingent and must make peace with society and nature or be destroyed". [See George Levine, *The Realistic Imagination: English Fiction from Frankenstein to Lady Chatterley* p. 56.) Hardy's Eustacia Vye is undoubtedly a glaring specimen of that "single character."

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# Interrogating the Gaze: Photographs and Memoirs of a British Woman Traveller in Colonial India\*

*Sananda Sahoo*

Travels or itineraries have been always seen as a transgression by its very tendency to defy political boundaries. Travellers, who follow their desire to travel, have always been seen as suspects for they seem to have allegiance to no particular authority. This paper will show that when the journeys are undertaken in a land which is about to experience full-scale colonisation, the idea travels as transgression gives a unique scope to probe how officially legitimate journeys encouraged by an imperialistic state transgress its original purpose and limits, and trace paths that reveal desires not only for an absolute power and control over the economy and the land but also attain to a cultural hegemony.

Travels of traders and later troops sponsored by East India Company in India in years leading to 1857, the year of the First War for Indian Independence, transgressed economic, political and cultural boundaries (necessarily in that order) as it gradually transformed from a commercial trading venture to one that virtually ruled India as it acquired auxiliary governmental and military functions, in a desire for greater control over the land

But after 1857, the aim of the imperialistic state had changed to building an empire, rather than just a trading post. In such a colonial world order, the paths traced by the scholars, missionaries, traders or soldiers from imperial Britain and the travel texts reveal a world order where these people are there in the Orient because “they could be there with very little resistance from the Orient’s part” (Said 7) as Edward Said said, trying to “manage — and even produce — the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said 3). Hence, their paths transgress all possible boundaries with the aim to impose a foreign order or appropriate the Orient or “set itself off against the Orient” (Said 3) to gain strength that will go to justify its imperialistic goals by projecting itself as culturally and sociologically superior.

Travel photographer Harriet Tytler accompanied her husband in the Bengal Regiment across the sub continent, and penned down her experiences between

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1828 and 1858 in her memoirs *An Englishwoman in India: The Memoirs of Harriet Tytler 1828-1858* when she was in her seventies. The text reveals how the coloniser, by the dint of economic power and recent political victory, took for granted cultural superiority that enabled the state to appropriate historical sites and a major historical event and cloak it with the narrative of the victor. This transgression of native's history and exclusion of their voice is part of the larger efforts of appropriation that will justify not only the presence but also the ownership of the land, the people, and the culture that will help in empire building.

The memoirs were evidently written in early 20<sup>th</sup> century when nationalist movement was gaining grounds. We do not know why Harriet chose to write her memoir so late in life or whether anyone might have urged her to do so, but as a participant of the colonising process, she might have felt what was coming. In a revealing admission in her memoirs, Harriet says it is futile to impose European laws on the natives as these will not succeed. The moment we identify cultural transgression in travels we take into account the resistance on the part of the natives that is so often left out from the colonial and post colonial studies. The memoirs and travel photographs that record the years of the first organized resistance show that the texts are fraught with nuances and tensions in the face of this resistance to efforts to assert absolute power over the natives.

In the memoir, the desire is translated into the writer's tendency to include only those intercultural dialogues that assert the political and cultural supremacy of the colonizers, exclusion of native narratives and the tendency to homogenize the natives into a squabbling mass of people divided along religious and caste lines and also loyalty towards the colonisers. This is translated into the photographs' total exclusion of the natives and usurpation of their history.

Harriet Tytler, the only woman photographer around 1857 in India, and her husband, a major in the army, photographed the sites associated with the war so that these could be used as exhibits and for sale. These were associated with the British victory and symbols of an emerging pride as rulers.

Since these photographs were also exhibited and were up for sale, they along with the memoirs become mass media texts where cultural transgression reverberates well beyond that of the narrator. The viewer and reader of these texts are not seen by those who are excluded (in case of the photographs) and those included, that is, the natives in the memoirs. This gives the unseen viewing a voyeuristic aspect. The unseen or indirect or 'mediated' viewing gives such a viewing an information-seeking function (Argyle 160) an observation which alerts us to the issue of the viewer's purposes.

### The gaze

This transgression is revealed in the gaze of the photographs and the memoirs – something that Mary Louise Pratt calls “the colonial gaze” (Pratt) and John Urry refers to as “the tourist gaze” (Urry).

In recorded texts, such as photographs or memoirs, a key feature of the gaze is that it reflects a status difference. As Jonathan Schroeder noted, “to gaze implies more than to look at - it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze” (Schroeder 208).

Harriet Tytler was more than aware of it. In her memoirs, *An Englishwoman in India*, she jokes, while narrating a dialogue with her head carpenter:

“He said, ‘You teach our women to rebel against their husbands.

If I find fault with my wife she says, “I will take you to court”.’

Does not this show that zenana teaching is sowing the seeds of women’s rights even in India? Just imagine the audacity of a native woman in former days daring to threaten her lord and master to take him to court. Surely the world is moving.” (Tytler 27)

This awareness of a status difference, of a feeling of superiority and a position from where western concepts can be imposed on natives, is obvious in the 500 large calotypes of scenes associated with the war that she and her husband took in 1858. The photographs by excluding any trace of the natives, does away with the gaze of the ‘Other’ that might tend to diminish the photographer’s credibility as an unbiased or objective viewer. (Baggaley, Ferguson, Brooks 30) Following a major research review, Cappella argues that human beings probably have an inherent disposition to empathize in reaction to the facial expression of emotion by others (Capella 47) and Messaris suggests that a direct gaze is likely to enhance the likelihood of both empathy and identification. By excluding the ‘Other’, the collection does away with any of these possibilities.

The photographs’ angle of view also mediates the way viewers see the sites in line with a victor’s narrative. Peter Warr and Christopher Knapper found that significant differences in viewers’ perceptions were generated by front-view photographs compared to side-view photographs, although neither view generated more favourable or more extreme impressions (Warr, Knapper 307).

### Years leading to 1857 war

Photographing and textual documenting were encouraged by the East India Company since early 19<sup>th</sup> century. But they were mostly done by soldiers and cartographers or women from the elite class, except perhaps Fanny Parks, the wife of a junior officer in the British regiment who took a picturesque

view of her travels in India, describing herself as a 'pilgrim' documenting the lives in the zenana or the exclusive circle of women.

The movement of regiments across India had gained utmost importance in the years leading to 1857 as it was necessary to strengthen the hold on a vast land. And the British troops were not alone. They were accompanied by their wives, fiancés, sisters, aunts, and ayahs, or nurses for their children.

Harriet Tytler was one among them, wife of a middle ranking officer who was with his regiment and his family in Delhi on May 10, 1857, when the war broke out in Meerut, only 40 miles away. When the rebels reached Delhi the following day, Harriet was among the few women who was present and survived the siege of Delhi. She experienced first-hand, unlike many of her contemporaries, the second battle for control over the Indian sub continent.

She neither had the social standing nor the status of a popular travel writer like Emily Eden, sister of Governor General of India from 1836 to 1842 and author of *Up the Country* (published 1866). But Harriet lived and traced the path of British military movement using two completely different modes of documentation from the perspective of a woman who was very much in touch with the realities and vagaries of everyday life, including a constant financial concern since her husband was not well-paid. After the war was over and a brief training from Felice Beato and Dr. John Murray, the couple took up photography. In May 1858 Tytler - newly promoted to a Major - and his family went on a six-month leave, produced the 500 calotypes, before proceeding to Calcutta.

Harriet said in her memoirs that when they were on home leave in England, the photographs were taken to Buckingham Palace to be shown to Queen Victoria although her mother's illness prevented the appointment from being kept. In 1859 the Photographic Society of Bengal exhibited the work to popular acclaim. A portfolio of their photographs was also exhibited in Calcutta at their residence and an advertisement appeared in *The Englishman* of June 20, 1859, and subsequent issues:

"Major Tytler's photographs of the scenes of the Mutiny, &c., &c., &c. These beautiful photographs are to be seen daily, at No. 15 Tank Square, at the office of the Honorary Secretary of the Photographic Society, who will receive orders for single copies or the whole collection." (Anonymous 1859)

The war for independence had considerably raised public interest about India in Britain, creating an increased market for photographs. Most of the photographs, therefore, catered to the interests of the British public who were the prospective buyers. By this time the conventions of the picturesque had

deeply taken root in the British consciousness and the exotic and the faraway, particularly somewhere like India, appealed to and attracted the public. Viewing and buying the pictures mean that the consumers are also participating in a transgressive behaviour and they in turn become voyeurs because the act of viewing the narrative of the victors without being seen by the naives is voyeuristic somehow.

Tytlers' work and subsequent exhibition and sale is also important because it "addresses photography's unique capacity for observation and implication" (as Karen Irvine, Curator of the Museum of Contemporary Photography in Chicago said in reference to Kohei Yoshiyuki's series as quoted in *New York Times*, September 23, 2007).

The collection, thus, took on some of the politics of commercial travel photography. The photographs were meant to evoke the memories of an event that had sketched itself so horribly in the collective British sub consciousness. India, so long, had been an idyllic place for the European settlers. Harriet recalls in her memoirs:

"...knowing the world as I do now, I have often wondered how my friends could have allowed me, a girl of 18, to travel a journey of 900 miles alone. It was an awful risk, but in those days the peasants of India would no more have thought of harming an English woman than of flying." (Tytler 58)

The war of 1857 had shattered the quasi-paradisal myth. The war had also made it imperative for the colonizers to strengthen the grip on the land if they had to realize the dream of Empire building.

The Tytler collection thus played a significant role in mapping the sites that played an important role in exhibition of British heroism and courage towards the building of an Empire. It also established a range of locations and experiences that British visitors or tourists must see and made them visually manifest and available.

### **Visual structure of photographs**

The photographs' visual structure mediated the relationship to the sites in ways that ensured they would be consumed aesthetically and interpreted ideologically, suppressing the horrid, bloody narrative of the natives.

Roughly 80 of their pictures are in the British Library collection, listed by Tytler, Robert and Harriet. Harriet's contribution to the pictures has not always been noted, and they are sometimes attributed to Robert alone, but the opposite has also occurred. *The Kootub, Delhi* is attributed to Harriet alone. The basis of this is not clear though.

Though the photographs are associated with the war, there are no signs of people in all the 80 photographs that we get to see. The monuments and historical sites, which witnessed scenes of action and struggle, all lack in any form of life.

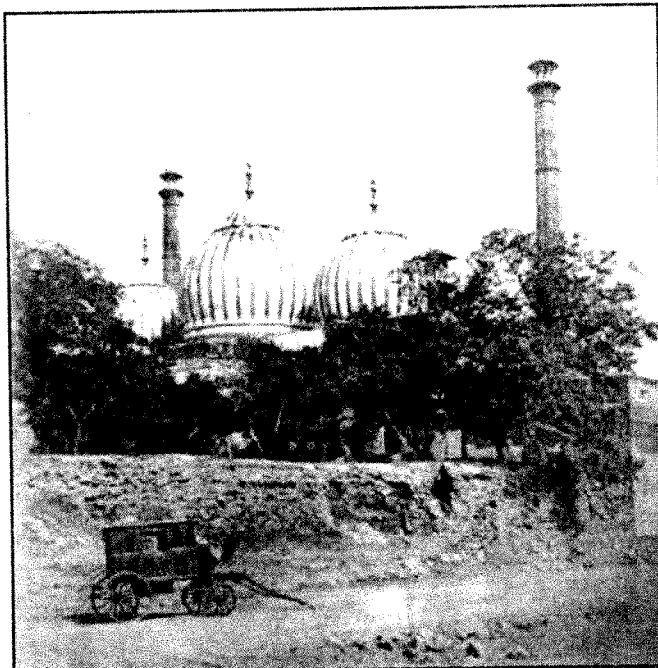


Fig. 1

In the photograph titled *A Mosque in Delhi. Father's ghari in front* (Fig. 1), the Zinat-ul-Masjid occupies the whole of the frame. The three striped marble domes that surround its prayer hall is the main draw at the first glimpse. The photographer's *hack ghari*, which stands on the roadway in the foreground, forms an interesting piece suggesting a form of European life apart from the seemingly empty historical building. However, even the vehicle is devoid of its driver, robbing the photograph of any chance of life.

The particular focus on historic buildings and technological impediments of long exposure and low contrast inherent in the calotype process, combined to produce an impression of India that had witnessed a gory and the first battle for independence not long ago, as a ghost city. The remains of the grand Mughal architecture do not have a shred of mystery or royalty after falling to the British guns, and now camera. The photographs of these near-sacred places where the battle was played out formed the first step to their becoming a part of tourists' Indian itinerary.

Delhi, for example, Harriet says in her *Memoirs*, "had always been noted

for its pests of flies, now doubled and trebled from all the carcasses of animals and dead bodies lying about everywhere" (Tytler 148). But the hardships she and her family went through and the pathetic conditions of living quarters in Delhi are not visible in a single photograph of Delhi the couple took after the war.

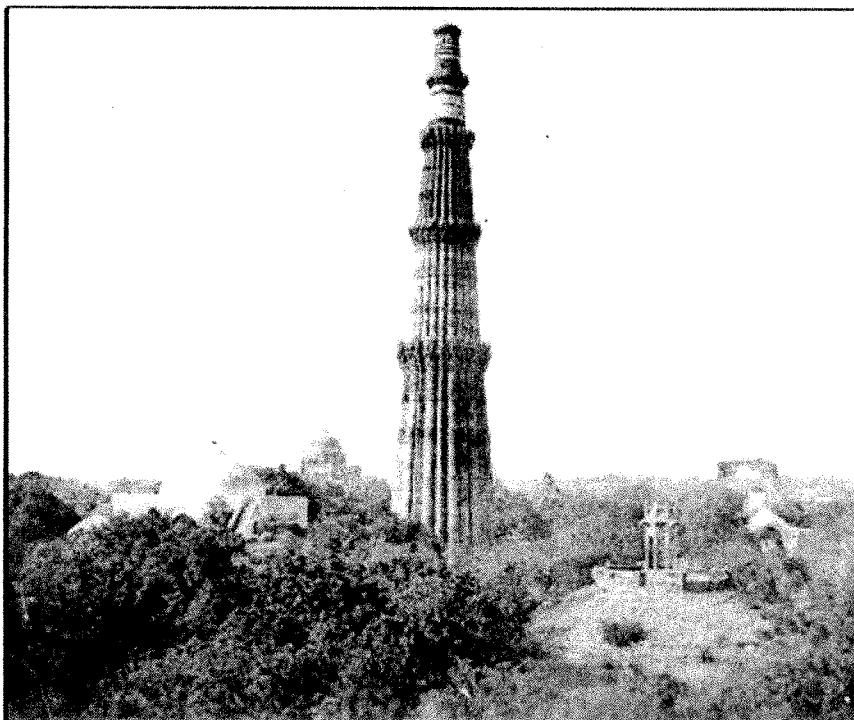


Fig. 2

*Ruins near the Kootub* (Fig. 2) is a general view from the east looking towards the city and surrounding tombs, the area much overgrown. The dome of the Alai Darwaza is at the left and a small pavilion, a late addition that for a time stood at the top of the tower, at the right. Adham Khan's Tomb can be seen in the distance to the left of the Qutub. The photograph, naturally, caters to the touristy desire of enjoying a large body of interesting memorials, with numerous details in a single gaze, and it seems that the photographs were taken keeping in mind the future market for these images. The photographs serve a substitute for travel itself.

The perspective had been carefully chosen to capture the main buildings surrounding the victory tower built by Qutb-ud-Din Aibak, the first King of Delhi. The condensed frame reveals an intention to size up the view, to measure it and to understand it.

This visual mapping of the panorama, a practice often used by early

travelling photographers, indicate that the 19<sup>th</sup> century belief that photography was an accurate system for scientific measuring and encompassing the world. The topographical attitude was a means to control territory. It was a particular instrumental form of power and photography, through its apparent objectivity, contributed to this representation.

Apart from the monuments well-known to the colonisers, the lesser monuments do not get a mention in captions. The Zinat-ul-Masjid is, for instance, dismissed as *Mosque in Delhi* (Fig. 1). The mosque was one of the major places of worship built by Zinat-ul-Nissa, a daughter of Aurangzeb in Shahjahanabad, south of the Red Fort and overlooking the river Yamuna.

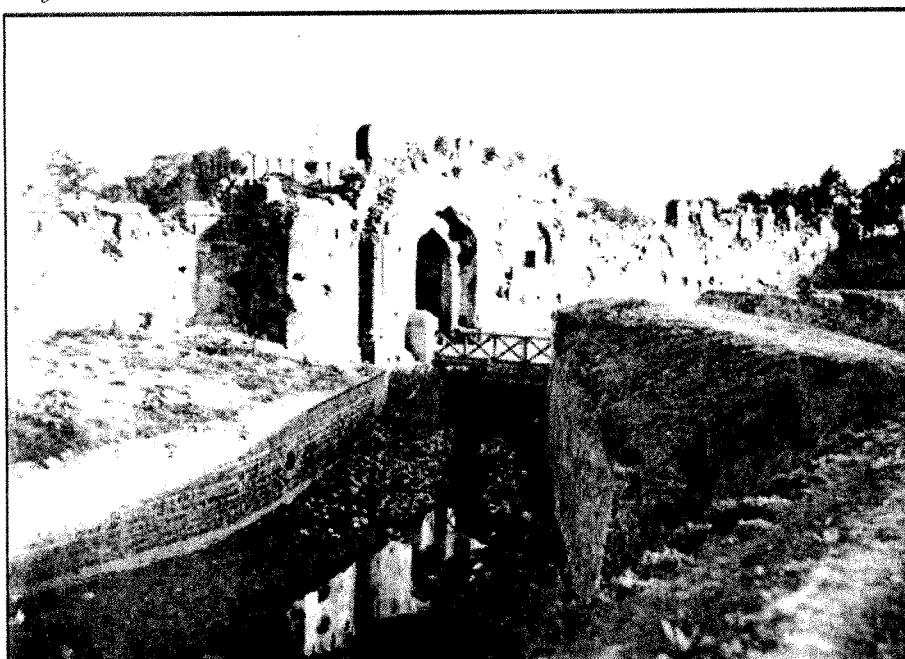


Fig. 3

At times the photographs turn explicitly revealing. *The Cashmere Gate, Delhi* (Fig. 3) for instance re-lives the history of annexation. Built at the northern end of the walled city of Delhi, Kashmir Gate was of strategic importance in the battle for Delhi during the war of 1857. In advance of their attack on Delhi, the British shelled the Kashmir Gate relentlessly for days. On September 14, 1857, they breached the walls and entered the city. The pock-marked gate, the frame shows a length of it, bears witness to the heavy firing that was needed to breach the grand, strong walls.

But even here, the purposes of the photograph can be ambiguous. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen have discussed the issue of the adoption of a *frontal angle* or an *oblique angle* in scenes which already have a linear

orientation. Where there are straight lines in a scene (such as in the outside or inside edges of a building like the landscape lines in front of Cashmere Gate) the image-producer has the option of choosing a frontal angle in which such lines are parallel to the picture plane or of shifting the *horizontal angle* of the depiction to a more oblique point of view. Kress and van Leeuwen have argued that the horizontal angle adopted represents “whether or not the image-producer [and hence the viewer] is ‘involved’ with the represented participants or not” (Kress, van Leeuwen 143), with the frontal angle representing involvement and an oblique angle representing detachment. They do not, however, cite empirical studies in support of this argument.



Fig. 4

No. 18. *The Residency at Residency at Lucknow* (Fig. 4) has a full view of the Residency Building, which was a key site of the siege of Lucknow. The Residency Complex, built in c.1800 for the British Resident in Lucknow, was occupied by Sir Henry Lawrence (1806-1857), Chief Commissioner of Awadh, at the outbreak of the war. Approximately 3,000 British inhabitants took refuge within the complex. The square tower on the right slightly in view is the one in which Lawrence was wounded during the siege and defence of the Residency; he died shortly after. The caption does not fail to mention this. Here the frontality can be read as an effort to evoke sympathy for the dead British soldiers.

John Tagg, however, argues that frontality is a key technique of “documentary rhetoric” in photography, offering up what it depicts for evaluation (Tagg 189). He shows that historically frontality is a “code of social inferiority” (Tagg 37).

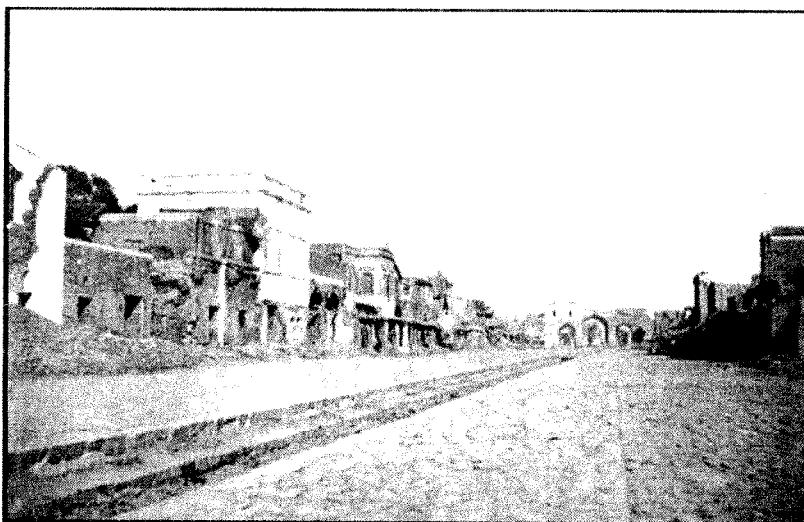


Fig. 5

Another frontal view is that of *Gate of Khaiserbagh, Lucknow* (Fig. 5) that shows the remains of the palace built between 1848 and 1850 by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. His vision for the complex was of a paradise on earth, showcasing the riches of the royal court. The photograph taken in 1858 is a grim reminder of the ransacking and looting by the British troops after the capture of Lucknow. But the long shot blurs any direct hint of the rampage and what the viewer actually sees is ruins in bright sunlight.



Fig. 6

The ravages wrought by British shelling on the historic buildings are hardly a concern for the photographers. The couple is more interested in the full view of the buildings or whatever remains of it. *The Bank of Delhi* (Fig. 6), for instance, was badly damaged, as a frontal view would have shown. The photographers, however, avoid the view and find the side view more comfortable which gives an overall picture of the imposing structure. Most of the debris and stones after the shelling is blocked from view.



Fig. 7

The photograph *Slaughter Ghat, Cawnpore* (Fig. 7) was the scene of a bloody massacre during the war. The insurgents offered the British non combatants remaining in Kanpur a deal of safe passage to Allahabad. On June, 27, 1857, the British were loaded on the boats but the Indian boatmen, instead of pushing off, jumped overboard and made for the shore. The rebelling sepoy fired on the boats leading to the death of most of the men, the surviving women and children were taken prisoner. The caption title of the photograph justifies its reason for its being in the collection as the peaceful vignette has no explicit evidence of the violent history.

The Red Fort in New Delhi was a focal point of the insurgents as it was the palace of the Mughal Emperor, the symbolic head of the 'uprising'. *The Bridge of Boats, Delhi* (Fig. 8) was possibly the gateway of many of the Fort inhabitants and Indian leaders in the face of the attack. It shows a row of boats across the river Yamuna near the Fort walls in 1858. This picture is



Fig. 8

also without any sign of life and seems to have a place in the collection due to the picturesque view and therefore obliterating ongoing history of the resistance. Interestingly, the memoirs too do have a sustained involvement with the aftermath of the war.



Fig. 9

The photograph *Back of Hindu Rao's House, Delhi* (Fig. 9) has nothing of the eye-catching element in it but the vast open field back of the house which dominates the frame is associated with a playground for British bravery. The house was built in c.1820 for William Frazer (1784-1855), agent to the Governor General of Delhi, and was bought by Hindu Rao after Frazer's death. During the war, the house was strategically important to the British and was held by Major Reid and a force of Gorkhas, who suffered severely from enemy artillery. "These little fellows throughout the siege did valiantly," said Harriet of them, referring to the Gorkhas' short stature. The building is now a hospital. The house, then, is the symbol of a property lost and found and held with courage for the British by their loyal armies and important in the British suppression of the 'Mutiny'.

In *rear views* we see the back of a depicted object. As Paul Messaris comments, "in our real-world interactions with others, this view from the back can imply turning away or exclusion" (Messaris 24-7). In the landscapes, Messaris suggests that there may be echoes of a painterly tradition in which this signifies turning away from the everyday reality to marvel at the spectacle, in this case of the British victory.

### Conclusion

The camera thus represents a "controlling gaze", that as we read with the memoirs, an intercultural enterprise, is rife with ambiguity as it transgresses cultural boundaries.

In her book, *On Photography* Susan Sontag referred to several aspects of "photographic seeing" which are relevant in the current context (Sontag 89):

"To photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed"; (Sontag 4)

"Photographing is essentially an act of non-intervention... The act of photographing is more than passive observing. Like sexual voyeurism, it is a way of at least tacitly, often explicitly, encouraging what is going on to keep on happening"; (Sontag 11-12)

"The camera doesn't rape, or even possess, though it may presume, intrude, trespass, distort, exploit, and, at the farthest reach of metaphor, assassinate - all activities that, unlike the sexual push and shove, can be conducted from a distance, and with some detachment". (Sontag 13)

The functions of the Tytlers' collection and the memoirs can be seen in the context of Michel Foucault's analysis of the rise of surveillance in modern

society. Photography promotes “the normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates and judges them” (Foucault 25).

The photographs also serve to underscore Harriet’s conviction penned down in her *Memoirs* of what might happen when the time comes for “the wretched agitators, who are ever ready to poison the minds of contended people, to do their utmost by sowing the seeds of discontent, by their one-sided and distorted tales of our oppression” (Tytler 28).

India, especially Delhi, Kanpur and Lucknow, thus becomes a place where British history was staged. The India, which obeyed other rules during that period, which tells other narratives, is blinded out. Travel here is a ritual of self-affirmation in which the world in general is presented as little more than the projection of the traveller’s attitude, in which the traveller’s standards are the only arbiters of discrimination, in which the world photographed and written down is the only world worth seeing.

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David Lester Richardson  
(1801—1865)

## David Lester Richardson

*As memory pictured happier hours, home sickness seized my heart,*

*I never thought of English land but burning tears would start;*

*The faces of familiar friends would haunt me in my sleep,*

*I clasped their thrilling hands in mine — then woke again to weep!*

[Richardson, "The Return from Exile," *Literary Leaves or Prose and Verse Chiefly written in India*. II: 40]

*One thing grieves me: the tone of sadness, I might say of settled melancholy that runs through all your utterances of yourself... You feel yourself an exile in the East; but in the West too it is exile; I know not where under the sun it is not exile.*

[Carlyle to Richardson, Letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 1838. Quoted in S.C. Sanyal, "David Lester Richardson" *Calcutta Review*. Volume CXXIII January 1906: 79]

David Lester Richardson (1801-1865) was the son of Lieutenant-Colonel David Thomas Richardson of the East India Company's Bengal Establishment. D.L. Richardson's father was a renowned linguist and translator of English poetry. His frequent contributions to the Bengal Asiatic Society have been carefully preserved in the Society's *Asiatic Researches*.<sup>1</sup> After his father's death in 1808 he lived with his uncle, Colonel Sherwood, of the Bengal Artillery. He came to India and joined the army as an ensign in the Second Bengal Native Infantry on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1819.

D.L. Richardson's literary career began with James Silk Buckingham's *Calcutta Journal* where he published a few poems in 1820. In 1821, Richardson married Marian, the daughter of Colonel W. Scott of the Bengal Army. In 1822 he published his first work, "Miscellaneous Poems" in Calcutta. This was a collection of his contributions in the *Calcutta Journal*. On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1823 Richardson became a lieutenant. In 1824, owing to ill-health, Richardson went back to England.

In London Richardson published his "Sonnets and Other Poems" (1825). It was later reprinted as "Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems, partly written in India," in the well-known Jones's Diamond Edition of the British poets. Richardson was the only living poet whose works were included in the collection of 1827 with works like *Paradise Lost*. To these reprints were appended several favourable criticisms and these were not too favourably received by Professor John Wilson in the *Blackwood's Magazine*.<sup>2</sup> While in London Richardson started a new periodical called the *London Weekly Review* in 1827. However the journal did not do too well and Richardson had to

sell its rights to Mr. Colburn and return to his military service in Bengal. Before he left, he was honoured with a public farewell dinner at the Freemasons' Tavern, presided over by the poet Thomas Campbell.

In 1829 Richardson returned to Bengal. On 29<sup>th</sup> October 1832, he was made a Captain, and in the next year, he was 'declared invalided and put on the list of military pensioners' (Sanyal "David Lester Richardson" *Calcutta Review*. Volume CXXIII January 1906: 72). He then accepted the editorship of the *Calcutta Literary Gazette*, the *Calcutta Monthly Journal*, and the *Bengal Annual*. The *Bengal Annual* was dedicated to Lady Bentinck, and in recognition of his literary merit, Lord William Bentinck appointed Richardson as an Aide-de-Camp in 1834. In the same year Dr. Tytler, Principal-Professor of the Hindu College, applied for leave of absence due to ill-health, and applications for his post were invited in anticipation of Dr. Tytler's resignation. Captain David Lester Richardson applied for the Principal-Professorship of the Hindu College and he joined as Principal-Professor of the College from January 1836.

In the Hindu College Richardson came to be addressed as "DLR." He was supposed to teach English Literature, History, Moral Philosophy and Composition to the students of two upper classes of the Hindu College. However his love for poetry overshadowed everything else and so he spent much more time in teaching Shakespeare and Pope than either History or Moral Philosophy. Richardson's reading of Shakespeare's plays enthused the young students to such a degree that they became convinced of the superiority of the English literature over the Native one.<sup>3</sup> His superb reading of Shakespeare won him many admirers.<sup>4</sup> Macaulay is reported to have said to him, "I may forget everything about India, but your reading of Shakespeare – never." (*Presidency College Centenary Volume*, Calcutta, 1956: 4). S.C. Sanyal quotes the reminiscences of a student of Richardson about his teaching methods and preferences:

He [Richardson] was much too absorbed in adoring the Muse to teach anything so well as his favourite branch. He did not teach History and Philosophy strictly so-called, and paying a superficial heed to them indulged most in what warmed his soul. Indeed he was never so enthusiastic in his vocation as when introducing his boys to an intimate acquaintance with the great poets of his nation, and enriching their minds with the most precious treasures of British thought. The two poets he pitched upon to teach his boys were Shakespeare and Pope, with whose writings his mind was thoroughly saturated. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and the two parts of *Henry IV*, together with Pope's

*Essay on Criticism and Prologue to the Satires*, were what he taught in endless alternation... The only history we studied under him was Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*... Calling one boy after another into his private room, he merely put questions to them by looking at the contents. He taught us composition by correcting our essays in the tiffin hour. Richardson always preferred our writing simple English, which he did himself. In the hall on the composition examination day, he used in loud voice humorously to caution us against committing *they is* and *he are* in spun-out long sentences... On our finishing a play or poem; it was his rule to call upon everyone of us for an opinion, a process by which he meant to develop our thinking and critical powers. Last of all he delivered his own judgment, in the course of which he travelled over a large field that formed the most interesting part of his tuition... Richardson literally acted upon Locke's advice – 'You may as well write on a trembling paper as on a trembling mind.' Indeed he knew no severity of manner – never showed any impatience or displeasure towards an agitated or funky boy who kept him waiting for his meaning. The backward and the promising were equally regarded without any open expression of fondness or otherwise ("David Lester Richardson" 74-76).

Ghulam Murshid contrasts Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and Richardson as teachers in *Lured by Hope*, the biography of Madhusudan Dutt.<sup>5</sup> He says that whereas Derozio 'believed strongly in the need to be aware of philosophical and social issues, as well as literary matters,' Richardson 'had no interest in philosophy.' (Murshid 22). He quotes Dharendranath Ghosh who points out this difference between the two:

Derozio laid emphasis on reading Locke, Hume and Paine. In DLR's time, they were replaced by Byron, Keats, Shelley and other Romantic poets... The differences in their characters affected the students of Derozio and DLR in different ways. Derozio's followers chiefly became social reformers. Those that DLR influenced became writers (Ibid).

In 1836 Richardson brought out his *Literary Leaves* in Calcutta. It was a collection of prose essays and poetry. He presented a copy to Thomas Carlyle, who wrote thus to Richardson:

I have read your volume... with true pleasure. It is written... with fidelity, with successful care, with insight and conviction as to

matter, with clearness and graceful precision as to manner: in a word, it is the impress of a mind stored with elegant accomplishments, gifted with an eye to see, and a heart to understand; a welcome, altogether recommendable book... (Letter dated 19<sup>th</sup> December 1838. Quoted in S.C. Sanyal, "David Lester Richardson" *Calcutta Review*. Volume CXIII January 1906: 78).

In 1837 Colonel Morison, the then Deputy-Governor of Bengal nominated Richardson to become his Aide-de-Camp. In 1840 Richardson's *Selections from British Poets* was published at the request of the Council of Education and the suggestion of Macaulay and Sir Edward Ryan, then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Calcutta. This was quite a voluminous work containing poems by over hundred poets ranging from Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton to Alfred Tennyson (who was then just about thirty one years old); Dr. John Leyden, Reginald Heber, Richardson to Derozio and even Kashiprasad Ghosh, the Indian poet who wrote in English. It also contained translations of the works of Homer, Virgil, Dante, Tasso and others. The poems were prefaced by a brief biographical note and critical comments on the style of the poet. These notes and comments were later reprinted as *Notices of the British Poets, Biographical and Critical, from Chaucer to Thomas Moore* (1848). Both the collection and the prefatory notes were greatly admired:

He [Richardson] appears in the volume before us as a biographer and critic. In both respects he evinces an intimate acquaintance with his subjects, and great taste and judgment in the manner of handling them. We may dissent occasionally from his conclusions; but even when we do, we cannot fail to admire the talent which he shows in maintaining that they are sound. The selection of the names of poets appears to be made with discernment ... But nothing in the volume before us has pleased us so much as the preface by which the work is ushered into notice. It is a piece of criticism displaying, in every page, the unequivocal traces of a mind of superior refinement, a full appreciation of the qualities which constitute true poetry, and an intimate acquaintance, not only with poetical works, but with general literature. (Review of *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day. The Metropolitan Magazine*. Volume XLI, September-December 1844: 537)

In 1842 Richardson again took leave owing to ill-health. On the expiry of

### David Lester Richardson

his leave he arrived in Calcutta in January 1845 and was made the first Principal-Professor of the newly established College at Krishnagar under the Council of Education. Later that year, he became the Principal of the Hooghly College. In the latter college he remained for two years and in 1848 became again the Principal of the Hindu College. However, owing to certain rumours and the irregularities of attendance Richardson was asked to provide an explanation by John Drinkwater Elliott Bethune, then President of the Council of Education.<sup>6</sup> Richardson refused and then resigned as Principal. Leaving the Hindu College, Richardson became the editor of the *Bengal Hurkaru* and private tutor to Jotindra Mohan Tagore.

In 1852, he published his *Literary Recreations or Essays, Criticisms, and Poems chiefly written in India*, which he dedicated to Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd, the author of the famous tragedy *Ion*. In 1853 he was made Principal of the Hindu Metropolitan College. In 1854 the college presented him a gold watch in recognition of his services. In the beginning of 1857, Richardson's daughter Violet died at Dum-Dum, and he proceeded home on leave. Before leaving Calcutta he was offered the job of the London correspondent of *Phoenix*, a daily journal, by its editor Captain Palmer, which Richardson accepted. Besides, his old pupils presented him with 'an address and a testimonial consisting of a purse and silver breakfast service' (Sanyal "David Lester Richardson" *Calcutta Review*. Volume CXXIII January 1906: 87) . In 1859 Richardson returned to Calcutta and Sir John Peter Grant, then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, appointed him as Professor of the Presidency College. But the Secretary of State for India called upon the Captain to resign the Professorship, as, from the fact of his being on the invalid pension list, he was precluded from taking service again. In February 1861, when Richardson left India for ever, his old pupils again presented to him 'an address and a testimonial consisting of a purse of Rs. 4000' (Ibid).<sup>7</sup>

Returning to England, Richardson was engaged by Sir John William Kaye, the famous historian of the Sepoy Mutiny to assist him in editing Allen's *Overland Mail* and *Homeward Mail*. Besides he became the proprietor of the "Court Circular" and edited it for sometime. Richardson passed away on November 17, 1865 at Clapham in Surrey.

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### Notes and References

1. In the seventh volume of the *Asiatic Researches* (471ff) Captain David Thomas Richardson had contributed an article on the *Bazeegurs* or *Nuts*. In his essay "On The Origin of the Gypsies," Robert S. Charnock observes,

According to [D.T.] Richardson, the Panchpeerce or Budeea are considered as appertaining to the same class as the Bazeegurs, and are also termed Nuts. They differ from the Bazeegurs in many points; though probably in their manners there will be found a stronger similitude to the gypsies of Europe, than in those of any other tribe. The gypsies also resemble some of the tribes of Hindustan in their fondness for carrion ... Both the gypsies and the Nuts are generally a wandering race of beings, seldom having a fixed habitation. They have each a language peculiar to themselves. That of the gypsies is undoubtedly a species of Hindostanee, and so is that of the Nuts ... The gypsies have their king; the Nuts their Nardar Boulah ; they are equally formed into companies, and their peculiar employments are exactly similar ; viz., dancing, singing, music, palmistry, quackery, dancers of monkeys, bears and snakes. ("On The Origin of the Gypsies," *Anthropological Review*. Volume IV, 1866: 95).

D.T. Richardson in his essay shows, by a comparative vocabulary of the Gypsies with the Hindostanie, that a considerable resemblance exists between these languages; and he conjectures that the people termed in England Gypsies

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descended originally from a branch of the *Bazeegurs*. Below is a small specimen of the long list he provided:

| <u>Gypsey</u> | <u>Hindostanie</u> | <u>English</u>      |
|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Pawnee        | Panee              | Brook, Drink, Water |
| Cauliban      | Kalaburn           | Black               |
| Davies, Devus | Dewus              | Day                 |
| Rattie        | Rat                | Dark night          |
| Can           | Kan                | The Ear             |
| Dad           | Dada               | Father              |

For more see, John Hoyland's *A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, & Present State of the Gypsies* (London: Darton, Harvey and Co., 1816: 131- 150).

2. Some of the favourable criticisms were added to the notice of the Diamond Edition of the British poets in *The Literary Gazette* (1827):

This little volume contains the effusions of a mind apparently refined, liberal and cultivated – *New Monthly Magazine*.

A little volume distinguished by considerable brilliancy and pathos – *Montgomery's Sheffield Iris*. (London: H. Colburn: 286)

The review in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1828) was particularly harsh. They found no reason to call Mr. David Lester Richardson a diamond. He is the only living poet whom they [Jones and Co.] have yet set — but the stone does not seem to us too dazzlingly brilliant to be looked at by weak eyes — although, to persons slenderly skilled in poetical mineralogy, it might pass for a tolerable Scotch pebble (Volume XXI: 856)

3. See Shibnath Shastri's *Ramtanu Lahiri o Tatkalin Bangasamaj* (first published 1908. Kolkata: New Age, 2007: 117) for more. Also see introductory note to Richardson's essay 'On the Education of the People of India through the medium of English Language' in this issue).
4. In their memoirs, many of his students talked about how good a teacher Richardson was. Rajnarayan Basu, for instance, praises him liberally:

Captain sahib had a remarkable grasp of English literature. I have never seen or heard anyone else read from Shakespeare – and explain the text – so well...I cannot describe the love and reverence I feel whenever I think of him... (Rajnarayan Basu, *Atmacharit*. Calcutta: Chirayat, 2006: 31. Quoted in Murshid 22).

Rajnarayan also mentions an incident that occurred when Richardson was teaching *Hamlet* and came to the Queen's speech where she informs Laertes about Ophelia's drowning (There is a willow grows aslant a brook/That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream. Act IV Scene 7: 166-7). While explaining this portion, Richardson asked the class that the leaves of the tree are green, so why has Shakespeare called them 'hoar leaves?' Since nobody could think of an answer, he himself explained that the lower portion of the leaf being

reflected in the water seems white and therefore it is called 'hoar leaves.' (*Atnacharit* 31).

5. Ghulam Murshid's biography of Madhusudan Dutt (*Ashar Chalane Bhuli*) contains several references to D.L. Richardson, his affection for Madhusudan and how good a teacher he was. Murshid even mentions that when Richardson used to be on leave, Madhu did not attend college because his favourite teacher was absent. Another biography of Madhusudan Dutt written by Jogindranath Basu mentions how Madhusudan used to imitate Richardson's handwriting (*Madhusudan Dutter Jibancharit*. Kolkata: Dey's, 2004: 61) and how Richardson encouraged his pupils, 'DLR, our beloved Professor, and the guiding angel to his [Madhusudan's] Muse, used to touch up his poetical exercises during the tiffin hours.' (Ibid 445). It was due to Richardson mainly that Madhu developed a taste in English literature. After having read Richardson's *Selections from the British Poets*, Madhu was so impressed that he is supposed to have told his friends, 'If only I could write such an Introduction!' (Murshid, *Lured by Hope: A Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutt* 23). For more, see *Ashar Chalane Bhuli (Lured by Hope: A Biography of Michael Madhusudan Dutt)*. Translated from Bengali by Gopa Majumdar).
6. Though it is not clear what the rumours were but Rajnarayan Basu mentioned that he had a 'defect in his character' (Quoted in Benod Behari Gupta, *Puratan Prasanga*. Kolkata: Pustak Bipani, 1989: 98). The Bethune-Richardson episode is mentioned thus in *Puratan Prasanga*:

Bethune forced Richardson to resign from his job...Richardson may have lost his job but till the end he did not know what it meant to surrender at discretion. While he was a teacher, a person came up to him and asked, "Why did you not explain the correct meaning of surrender at discretion to the students? Don't you know it?" Richardson replied, "I never surrendered at discretion and therefore it is possible I do not know what it exactly means."...It is no secret to anybody whom Bethune referred to as the 'hoary libertine' in his speech...But Captain [Richardson] did not know what surrender at discretion is. Ridiculing Bethune, he wrote, 'There was a man who was *little* and he was *beaten*...' (Ibid).

Pratap Mukhopadhyay however gives quite a different version of the incident in his *Hindu College: Presidency College*. He quotes Pramathanath Mallick saying that since Richardson went against Alexander Duff's wishes, he could not work any longer at the Hindu College. He also hints at Richardson's popularity among the students of Hindu College which was a cause of envy (*Hindu College: Presidency College*. Kolkata: Praiti Prakashan, 1993: 117n). Pratap Mukhopadhyay states that Bethune was envious of Richardson's growing popularity and his literary achievements. He cites the examples of David Hare and John Kaye both of whom did not support Duff's mission of religious conversion to Christianity and how both of them were castigated for their lack

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of faith. He speculates that Duff had instigated Bethune against Richardson as he too was a 'firm unbeliever in the Christian religion.' (See Jogindranath Basu, *Michael Madhusudan Dutter Jiban Charit* for more on Madhusudan's conversion and how Richardson was completely uninvolved in the entire matter). Bethune was so angry with Richardson that he had publicly insulted him in the Annual Prize distribution ceremony of the Hindu College at Town Hall on February 24, 1850 (*Hindu College: Presidency College* 119n).

7. An extract from this address delivered on February 4, 1861 at the Town Hall has been quoted by Ghulam Murshid in *The Heart of a Rebel Poet*. The address read by Rajnarayan Basu went like this:

...the people of this country [...] can never forget how deeply they are indebted to you for your successful endeavours to improve the intellectual condition of the native youth entrusted to your care, you have taught them to appreciate the pure and elegant literature of the West, and to love the true and beautiful in Art and Nature. Your instruction was never dry and pedantic; it was ever calculated to make study itself a labour of delight...while the lucidity, eloquence and fervour of your lectures fixed the attention of your pupils, and made them intelligible to the dullest comprehension. Such teaching is a rare art, we cannot but deplore the loss which the Native community must sustain by your final departure from the shores of India (Ghulam Murshid ed. *The Heart of a Rebel Poet: Letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt*. New Delhi: OUP, 2004: 159n).

The people who signed the address included Raja Radhakanta Deb, Kalikrishna Bahadur, Pratap Chandra Singh, Kali Prasanna Singh, Ramaprasad Ray, Ramanath Tagore, Jaykrishna Mukherji, Jotindra Mohan Tagore, Rajendralal Mitra, Kishori Chand Mitra, Shyama Charan Law and Gourdas Basak.

[Collated by Piyali Gupta]

# On the Education of the People of India through the medium of English Language

*David Lester Richardson*

[This essay is an offshoot of the Orientalist-Anglicist debate of the 1830s about the nature of colonial education in India. The East India Company was earlier opposed to the introduction of English education in India for the fear of a subversive influence on the conservative Indian society. The first institution for the education of the colonial subject was established in Calcutta in 1781 and was called the Madrissa or Muhammadan College. The next institution to be founded was the Sanskrit College of Benaras. Both these institutions promoted Oriental learning in Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit. With the arrival of William Bentinck as the Governor-General and the evangelical movement in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, Anglicist education became the favoured mode of education in India. Charles Grant, in his influential treatise, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain* (1792), argued for the introduction of English education and Christianity for the moral and spiritual development of the Indians]

The true cure of darkness, is the introduction of light. The Hindoos err, because they are ignorant; and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them, would prove to be the best remedy for their disorders ... (Zastoupil and Moir 83).

The Committee of Public Instruction under H.H. Wilson gradually introduced Western science and English into colleges functioning under its patronage. However as Charles Trevelyan replaced Wilson as the President of the committee, he began a campaign in support of the Anglicist cause in the press and for the establishment of 'our language, our learning, and ultimately our religion in India' (Philips 1239).

The circumstance which gave rise to the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy was the interpretation of a clause in the Charter Act of 1813 which stipulated that, out of any surplus revenue, a sum about £10,000 a year should be set aside for 'the revival and improvement of literature, and the encouragement of the learned natives of India, and for the introduction and promotion of a knowledge of the sciences' (Ibid 91). The Committee of Public Instruction was appointed to find out methods for utilization of the funds. They could not come to a conclusion and then the Orientalist-Anglicist controversy finally came to a head in 1834, when Trevelyan and other Anglicists proposed replacing Sanskrit and Arabic studies with English-language instruction at Agra College. Since the two groups were unable to resolve their differences, it was decided that the difference should be settled by the Governor-General on the basis of policy statements submitted by the two groups. Bentinck finally referred this question to Macaulay who took up the Anglicist cause. Extolling the European literature and sciences and arguing that Indians have a growing desire for Western

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education, Macaulay's 'Minute on Education' (February 2, 1835) defined the object of English education, '... to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.'

William Bentinck, the then Governor-General of India concurred with the Anglicists and in his resolution of March 7, 1835 laid down the following points:

1. "That the great object of the British Government ought to be the promotion of European literature and science amongst the natives of India and that all funds appropriated for the purpose of education would be best employed on English education alone.
2. That while the colleges of Oriental learning were not to be abolished, the practice of supporting their students during their period of education was to be discounted.
3. That Government funds were not to be spent on the printing of Oriental works; and
4. That all the funds at the disposal of the Government would henceforth be spent in imparting to the Indians a knowledge of English literature and science." (*The Story of English in India* 37-38).

Thus ended the Orientalist- Anglicist controversy and English education was initiated in India.

This essay first published in 1836, is part of the decade-long debate between the Orientalists and the Anglicists over the content and medium of education in India. Arguing for the introduction of English education in India, Richardson's essay is important not only because it arrives at a crucial juncture in the history of colonial education in India but also because Richardson as the Principal and Professor of Hindu College had the first-hand experience of imparting English education to the students. He did succeed in creating 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect' as students of the Hindu college under his tutelage forgot all about native literature and language and immersed themselves in the study of Shakespeare, Bacon and Pope. In 1841, Ramkamal Sen examined the students in Bengali and was dissatisfied with the results. He wrote: 'In short they appear to understand English better than their own language, to which they attach little or no interest in comparison with English.' (*Annual Report of Hindu College* 1843-7. Quoted in Murshid 24).

Richardson was the literary patron of these young students and encouraged by him, many wrote poems as well as narratives which were published in the *Bengal Annual* and *Calcutta Literary Gazette*. Harachandra Ghose's poem which wittily recreated the Greek poet Anacreon in Bangla was included by Richardson in the first volume of the *Bengal Annual* (1830). Kylas Chunder Dutt's 'A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945' that foresees the ultimate Indian confrontation with the British was published in the *Calcutta Literary Gazette* in 1835. Rosinka Chaudhuri informs us that Gooroo Churn Dutt's *School Hours or Poems, Composed at School* (1839) and Rajnarayan Dutt's *Osmyn: An Arabic Tale* (1844) were dedicated to their teacher,

Richardson (Chaudhuri 93). Shaping an entire generation of young Indian students, Richardson as both a theorist and practitioner, is truly a significant though marginalised figure in the history of English Studies in India.]

Some of the admirers of *Orientalism* have battled with more ability than success in favour of the vernacular, in preference to the English language as a means of communicating the literature and science of the West to the people of India. They venture to compare it with the Latin and the English, and even roundly assert that the Bengali is quite as rich and expressive as either of those languages. It is added that all the subtle distinctions of metaphysics may be taught in Bengali quite as well as in English. How a language which has scarcely any literature at all can be compared for copiousness, flexibility and precision, to a language that has been cultivated for ages by the greatest poets, orators, and philosophers which the world has known, is a riddle that it would be difficult to solve. Bengali compared to English is as lax and meagre, as are almost all other ancient languages compared with Greek. "The obstacles," says Sir James Mackintosh (in the introduction to his *View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*), "which stood in the way of Lucretius and Cicero, when they began to translate the subtle philosophy of Greece into their narrow and barren tongue, are always felt by the philosopher when he struggles to express, with the necessary discrimination, his abstruse reasoning in words which, though of his own language, he must take from the mouth of persons to whom his distinctions would be without a meaning."<sup>2</sup> If the Latin compared with the Greek is a "narrow and barren tongue," the same may be said of the Bengali when compared with the Latin, and with equal justice when compared with the English; for the latter has been so vastly improved by careful cultivation, by the taste and genius of a host of native writers, and by the judicious introductions of expressive foreign words, that, perhaps, no other living language may be compared with it for force, fertility and exactness. And yet this language, with all its excellencies, is not even now entirely fitted for the use of the metaphysician, and perhaps never will be. Nothing is more common amongst our authors than the most pathetic complaints respecting the imperfections of the language. Professor Stewart, amongst other eminent metaphysicians, has spoken of the perplexing obscurity, in which mental philosophy has been involved by the vagueness and ambiguity of words.<sup>3</sup> If so comparatively rich and flexible a language as ours, is often found inadequate to express the subtler metaphysical distinctions, how unreasonable is it to imagine that such a language as the Bengali, in its present state, can be successfully devoted to such a purpose! It would take several centuries to bring it to a state of copiousness and refinement.

The obstacles in the way of introducing the English language to the people of India, have been greatly exaggerated by the *Orientalists*. If there were but one spoken and written language in all India, the objection to the introduction of the English language would seem more plausible; but when we consider the multiplicity of languages and characters already in use amongst the natives, it seems perfectly ridiculous to talk of the difficulty of introducing a foreign tongue. Are not the Arabic and Persians, foreign languages? Is not the greater part of the learning of the East embodied the Sanscrit? Would it be a whit more difficult or less useful to teach the living English than the dead Sanscrit? Is the Roman character more hieroglyphical or less distinct than the Nagree?

Some of our most ardent *Orientalists* insist upon the necessity of translating the productions of the Western writers into Arabic or Sanscrit, and when they carried everything before them in the councils of the committee of the Public Instruction, they devoted no less a sum than 65,000 rupees to remunerate Doctor Tytler for the translation into Arabic of six books – five of them of a medical character, and one of a mathematical!<sup>4</sup> Luckily, for the youth of India, Lord William Bentinck had sense and decision enough to put a sudden stop to these preposterous waste of toil and money, and since that time a most wholesome change has been effected in the entire system of Indian education. We now send out of our colleges hundreds of fine-minded youth who are not only familiar with English words, but with English thoughts and feelings. Instead of the old system of bribing boys with a fixed remuneration of some 16 or 20 rupees per mensem to acquire a knowledge of the astronomy of Ptolemy and the medicine of Galen, we have our schools crowded with enthusiastic youth who deem it precious privilege to be admitted upon the payment of a monthly sum,<sup>\*\*</sup> which, small as it may seem, is often giving with difficulty and inconvenience. But yet they willingly and proudly make this pecuniary sacrifice for the sake of an acquaintance not with Ptolemy and Galen, or with the Oriental writers of licentious tales, but with Shakespeare and Milton, and Bacon and Newton, and Addison and Johnson! Even the late Doctor Tytler himself, an indefatigable student in Oriental literature and a violent opponent of the *Romanizing* system introduced by Sir William Jones,<sup>5</sup> and followed up with so much ardour by Mr. Trevelyan acknowledges that the English language ought to be “an object, nay, a paramount object, in native education;”<sup>6</sup> and while he is opposing Mr Trevelyan’s plan of *Anglicizing* the whole literature of India, on account of its supposed difficulty, or rather its supposed impossibility, he admits that the vernacular dialects cannot be thoroughly understood by the native of India, or used with propriety without a knowledge of their learned language. If, then, amongst the natives of India,

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\*\* The boys at the Hindu College pay five rupees per mensem.

all education beyond the most ordinary kind, requires the knowledge of more than one language beside the vernacular, what impropriety or unreasonableness can be imputed to those who desire to supplant such an extra or foreign acquisition as that of a Arabic or Sanscrit by the introduction of English? It will hardly be denied by the most bigotted *Orientalist*, that the latter contains nobler treasures of literature and science than any Eastern language.

One would imagine that all mankind would be anxious to get rid as much as possible of the curse of Babel, and would aim at acquiring a uniformity of language; but there are natives of considerable acuteness who yet do not understand how great a blessing would be conferred upon their country by the abolition of immense variety of dialects which now divide so many millions of their countrymen into different tribes. Nothing would more speedily or more effectually civilize the people of this vast land, and give them political strength, than a uniformity of language. It is the great bond of social union. It would change a thousand tribes into one people. A community of language is a community of thought. And if the people have now to choose a language it is natural to suppose that they would give the preference to that of their more enlightened governors, many of whom, we hope, are quite as anxious to improve the mind of India, as to increase its revenue. When people talk of the extreme difficulty of introducing the English language, they forget that it is not offered to *men* but to *children*. It is not the present but the rising generation upon whom this blessing is to be conferred; and every one knows with what extreme facility a child imbibes a language. The children of European parents in India generally speak English and Hindustani with equal facility. They learn them both simultaneously. And why should not the children of Indian parents do the same? We will venture to say that, if Government would offer teachers a remunerating salary, instead of the pittance that is awarded to them, a sufficient number of competent persons would almost instantaneously be found, and if the English language system were pursued with zeal and assiduity, in less than a quarter of a century there would be millions of young natives able to speak and write it with ease and accuracy. It cannot be doubted that it would take a much longer time for the natives to improve any of their own languages than to learn English. The science of the West could not be introduced into the Bengali language without the cultivators of the latter borrowing or inventing the entire nomenclature, and there are delicate shades of thought, and exquisite turns of expression, that could never be transferred into the dialects of the East. The improvement of an imperfect language is a dreadfully slow process whereas the acquisition of a new one, especially by the young, may be effected with the utmost ease and rapidity. If the Government once set earnestly to work upon their present

plan, the result will be far more speedy and effective than is generally imagine, even by the majority of the Anglicizers themselves. It is not easy to reckon the good that has already been compasse by the English education bestowed on Indian youths. Many of them, with a most generous and noble zeal, excited by the moral influence of an English education, are in the habit of devoting their leisure hours to the task of communicating to their poorer countrymen the blessings they have themselves received at the hands of the Englishmen. The public little know what a vast number of native children are thus receiving gratuitous instruction in English from the alumni and the ex-students of our colleges. We are to add to the effect of this most benevolent practice, the influence of their example and conversation even upon their seniors who have not enjoyed the same advantages. Knowledge spreads like wild-fire.

The *Orientalists* are rejoiced to have Mr. Adam<sup>7</sup> on their side. It must be admitted that if a clear head and strict integrity be entitled to respect, there are not many men in the world who have a better claim to it than Mr. Adam. At the same time, we may take the liberty to observe, that his authority on a question of this nature is not decisive. When he went to Rajshaye to make his Education Report, his sentiments betokened "a foregone conclusion." He was already prejudiced in favor of the native languages; and Mr. Adam is one of those men who combine the most honest intentions with an obstinacy of will that no opposition, however fair and reasonable can easily subdue. He will grant nothing. He is "predetermined not to give a single sou." Because he discovered that in Rajshaye there were more schools for instruction in the vernacular than in the English tongue, he jumped to the conclusion, that the fact affords an index to the disposition of the people, and that we ought to attend their desires. This is as much as to say that the miserable system of education, if education it can be called, pursued in any semi-barbarous country, should by all means be encouraged, because it is still adopted by as many of the people as have enjoyed little or no intercourse with the Europeans. What is to be expected from the ignorant inhabitants of obscure villages in India in which a white face is a wonder? It is assuredly a wild absurdity to imagine that these simple people can form any conception of the comparative advantages of different systems of education. They are utterly ignorant of the nature of the blessings that an English education would confer. If it be true, that they desire an Indian education in preference to an English one, we hope the British Government will not act the part of Jupiter, and curse its petitioners by granting their foolish prayers. Let us not be guided by the blind. The natives in the neighbourhood of Calcutta, and other large cities, have had their mental vision couched. The filmy curtain has been drawn aside, and they can distinguish good from evil. These men acknowledge the vast advantages of

a study of the English language, and they eagerly send their children to our colleges. The youths themselves voraciously devour the mental treat that we place before them. their appetite for European literature and science is so intense, that no ordinary exertions on the part of their teachers can keep pace with their desires. At the opening of the Hooghly College<sup>8</sup>, there were no less than fifteen hundred native boys amongst the candidates for admission. The Hindoo College is always full as it can hold of students who *pay* for their education. Is not this stronger argument in favor of the vernacular dialects from the customs of ignorant villagers, who are guided solely by the example of their forefathers?

We are sorry to see some of the *Orientalists* quoting with approbation the vulgar absurdities of Cobbett upon the subject of the learned languages. Cobbett wrote with clearness and vigour upon local or temporary topics, but he knew nothing of general principles, and was a very miserable philosopher. The learned languages are not taught for the words alone, but for the thoughts with which the words are indissolubly connected. The signs of thought cannot be studied without familiarizing the student with what they stand for. We are free to confess that somewhat too much time is devoted at our Colleges in England to the acquisition of Greek and Latin to the neglect of our mother tongue. If the English were a barbarous and barren language, there would be a fair excuse for such expenditure of time and labour; but as it is unquestionably enriched with high, and elegant, and varied learning, it is injudicious to pay less attention to our own living tongue than to the dead languages of the foreign countries. Many a tolerable Greek and Latin scholar is utterly ignorant of the great authors of his own country, and is unable to write or speak his own language with grammatical propriety. But while we condemn this absurd preference of other languages to our own, we are by no means disposed to second the opinions of those who think, that in reading the works of the great ancient authors, a boy is learning words alone. We cannot learn words alone. It is impossible to learn words without making ourselves in some degree acquainted with the objects of which they are the symbols. In fact, as it has often been observed, true words are things, and the only things too, that last for ever! Temples, and towers, and cities and their inhabitants pass away, but written words remain. The works of Homer and Hesiod exist in words, as the mind exists in conjunction with the body. Separation is death. Dr. Joseph Warton was right enough in his strictures on a couplet of Pope, in which the sentiment of Cobbett is anticipated. "To read," (says he, with the generous enthusiasm of a scholar,) "to read, to interpret, to translate the best poets, orators and historians, of the best ages; that is, those authors 'that supply most axioms of prudence, most principles

of moral truth, most examples of virtue and integrity, and most materials for conversation,' cannot be called confining youth to words alone, and keeping them out of the way of real knowledge."<sup>9</sup>

It was the opinion also of a far higher authority, the clear and lofty minded Milton, that "*if passages from the heroic poems, orations and tragedies of the ancients were solemnly pronounced, with right accent and grace, they would endue the scholars even with the spirit and vigour of Demosthenes or Cicero, Euripides or Sophocles.*"<sup>\*\*</sup>"<sup>10</sup> Any time that could be spared from the study of our own authors might be devoted to our English youth with great advantage to the ancients; and if the field of English lore were less fertile than it is, we should hardly object even to the present disproportionate attention to the literature of Greece and Rome. The case is very different with the Bengali and the English. The most strenuous advocates for the Bengali do not venture to deny that there is an infinitely larger quantity of noble materials for the food of the mind in the language of England. But they imagine that they can transfer with ease and rapidity the best portion of this intellectual wealth into the vernacular, through the medium of translation. There cannot be a more deplorable mistake. A glance at our English translations of the works of the ancients would suffice to convince any reasonable man of the excessive difficulty of transferring the literature of one language into that of another, even where there is some congeniality between the languages of the original and the translation. Good English scholars, acquainted with the ancients only through so many ages and in so many different lands upon the authors of Greece and Rome. But the learned have no difficulty in furnishing a solution of the mystery. They tell us that the spirit of the great authors, who have become immortal heirs of fame, has evaporated entirely in the process of translation.

One of the *Orientalists* observes, that Pope's translation of Homer is a master-piece, and must rank among English Epics next to *Paradise Lost*. If Pope had written nothing besides this translation or rather paraphrase of Homer, his rank as a genuine poet would have been far lower than it now is. The truth is, that all English critics at present concur in condemning it. The simple and sublime old bard is dressed like a modern coxcomb. "It is a pretty poem," said Bentley to Pope, who had urgently pressed for his opinion of his translation, "but you must not call it Homer." If the entire spirit and character of ancient authors is so changed by translators of skill and genius, who have a copious and flexible language at their command, we must expect a still greater loss of original spirit in the transfusion of ideas from English into

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<sup>\*\*</sup> The same may be said of the perusal of Shakespeare and Lord Bacon by the young natives of India.

Bengali. The late Dr. Tytler used to say that nothing could be more contemptible than the attempts hitherto made to transfer our literature into the vernacular, and though he himself was a man of very great ability and learning, we may fairly express a doubt whether his own Arabic translations were not better adapted to furnish food for mirth to those acquainted with the original language than the means of instruction to the majority of native students.

Our opponents acknowledge, that if the vernacular dialects be the exclusive means of cultivation, then English poetry, from the difficulty of translation, must be given up altogether. And yet our poetry is by no means an insignificant or useless portion of English Literature. When we speak of British genius, amongst the very first names that start up in our memory and demand our gratitude and admiration, are those of Shakespeare and Milton! The influence of the writings of such men upon the intellectual character of a nation, is as vast as it is undefinable. Shakespeare's magical creations have become fixtures in the minds of his countrymen, and his finer thoughts and axioms are as familiar in our mouths as household words. The editor of a native paper lays the flattering unction to his soul that his countrymen are richer in poetical genius than the English, in spite of our Chaucer and Spencer and Shakespeare and Milton! "*Every body knows,*" says he, "*that we, the inhabitants of this sunny clime, have poetry in greater abundance than the inhabitants of the bleak regions of England, and other polar countries.*" We confess that we are amongst *no bodies*, if *every body* is of this opinion. If we could be convinced that there was so much glorious poetry in the vernacular, and that the natives could do so well without ours, we should be less disposed to advocate the English; for there is no doubt that mere science could be transferred into any language with more ease and success than poetry.\*\* We have always had a notion, however, that the all sidedness of mind, and the profound and philosophical knowledge of the human heart displayed by Shakespeare, and the sublime morality and lofty imagination of Milton, were immeasurably beyond the reach of Indian poets, who were little better, in our estimation, than dealers in miscellaneous stores of tears and smiles, clouds and sunbeams, and gems and flowers. The general impression of all other nations regarding the poetry of the East, is extremely unfavorable. The poetry of Indian Bards is looked upon as a glittering gewgaw. It is bespangled like

\*\* Let us communicate as much of our scientific knowledge as we can; but at the same time we should always remember that science alone ought not to be our sole or even chief object in the education of the natives. IT is of paramount importance that we should *raise the moral tone of their minds*; a desire for the acquisition of science and general knowledge must necessarily follow.

## On the Education of the People of India through the medium of English Language

a coronation robe. There can be no great poetry where there is no simplicity of taste or purity of feeling. The greatest poet that the world ever knew was remarkable for the naked grandeur of his style, and Milton, who does not stand much below him was also distinguished for a chaste sublimity. His poetry is often sculptural and colourless. But, perhaps, our opponents do not mean to institute a comparison between the poetry of India and that of England in reference to *quality*, so much as in point of *quantity*. If this be their intention, we have no wish to disturb their complacency.

With respect even to prose literature, there is scarcely a book that we can mention, that we would not greatly suffer by a translation into Bengali. Style is as much a part of an author as the mortal frame is a part of our strangely compounded being. Even the *Orientalists* will acknowledge that the glorious thoughts of Milton, expressed with such extraordinary force, would lose more than half their effect in any other diction. We are of opinion that it would be the same with the prose writings of our moralists. There is an insinuating grace in the manner of Addison and Goldsmith, that could only be imitated to perfection by kindred genius and in the same language. But in such a language as the Bengali, the charm could never be preserved by even greater skill and ingenuity than are displayed in the original. Such writers make morality enchanting.

“Truth from *their* lips prevails with double sway.”<sup>11</sup>

It is astonishing how little novelty of thought is to be found in any age or country in the writings of the most eminent moralists and philosophers. New truths are rare, and the human heart remains unchanged. It is the wondrous felicity with which great writers place old truths in a new light, and the grace, clearness or force of their style, that raises our admiration and renders them so useful to mankind. We are told of the difficulty of procuring schoolmasters; but this difficulty is trifling, indeed, when compared with that of procuring competent translators.<sup>\*\*</sup>

When we take all these considerations into a fair account, it is not difficult to come to a conclusion upon the main subject of the present article. We are thoroughly convinced, that by instructing native children in the English

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\*\* Perhaps the most convincing argument in favor of native education through the medium of the English tongue, is a reference to the character and accomplishments of some of those young men who have passed through the Hindu College. Their minds are infinitely more elevated and more robust than those of their countrymen in general, and they talk and think and act like well educated Europeans; they read Bacon and Shakespeare and Johnson and Addison with delight, and have a sense of the true and the beautiful, which could never be acquired from oriental literature alone, of which the general character is confessedly feeble and impure.

language (which in the dawn of their intellects is an easy attainment), we put into their hands the golden key of a vast treasury of precious knowledge that they would never gain access to by any other means. For their present feeble and defective language (which still, however, they are not obliged wholly to neglect) we give them an instrument for the use of their minds that is in a state of comparative perfection; and we expedite their passage in the road to knowledge, at a rate that will cause the rising generation to make greater progress in twenty years, than could be effected through the medium of the vernacular languages in a century.

### Notes and References

1. This essay has been taken from the second edition of *Literary Leaves; Or, Prose and Verse Chiefly Written in India* (Volume II: 323-334) published in 1840 by W.H. Allen & Co. It was first published in 1836.
2. The book that Richardson refers to is *The General View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy Chiefly during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* written by Sir James Mackintosh (1765-1832) and first published in 1831. This was prefixed to the seventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It was severely attacked in 1835 by James Mill in his *Fragment on Mackintosh*. Mackintosh was a Scottish publicist and was trained as a doctor and barrister, working also as a journalist, judge, administrator, professor, philosopher and politician. His *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791) was a contribution to the debate begun by Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. He was appointed Recorder (Chief Judge) of Bombay, taking up the post in 1804. He was not at home in India, where he became ill, and left for England in November, 1811.
3. Richardson talks about Dugald Stewart (1753-1823) who was a Scottish metaphysician and philosopher. Stewart's publications include *Outlines of Moral Philosophy* (1793), *Philosophical Essays* (1810), and *Philosophy of the Active and Moral Powers of Man* (1828). His major publication, however, was *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* which appeared in three parts over a period of 35 years. The first appeared in 1792, the second in 1814 and the third part in 1827.
4. The books that Doctor John Tytler translated according to the *Catalogue of the Library of the Honourable East-India Company* and *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain* are as follows:
  - Anatomical Description of the Heart, extracted from the *Edinburgh Medical Dictionary* (1828)
  - Anis ul Musharrahin; or the Anatomist's *Vade-Mecum*, by Dr. Hooper (1830)
  - Jawa'me'-ul-ilm ul Riyázi, a Translation of Hutton's Mathematics (1835).
  - The Aphorisms of Hippocrates (1832)

### On the Education of the People of India through the medium of English Language

5. Sir William Jones (1746-94) worked in India as a High Court judge from 1783-1794. In his *Dissertation on the Orthography of Asiatick Words in Roman Letters* (1788), he devised a method of transliterating Oriental languages into the Roman alphabet.

6. The complete quotation is as follows:

It is not our business to construct a literature, but to assist and encourage the natives to construct one for themselves, - and this can only be done by the cultivation of their own language. A National literature made by foreigners in a foreign language is a contradiction in terms; English, I admit, ought to be an object, nay even a paramount object in Native education, but a National literature they must construct for themselves in their own language (Select Papers on the Subject of Expressing the Languages of the East in the English Character, Sreerampore Press, 1834: 62)

7. William Adam's Report on the State of Education in Bengal and Bihar has been referred to here. It gives the number of schools, languages used, four stages of school instruction, Sanskrit learning and provision of elementary education for all sections. For more on Adam's report, see Joseph DiBona ed. *One Teacher One School*. Delhi: Impex Biblia, 1983 and *The Great Indian Education Debate: Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy*, 1781-1843.

8. Presently the Hooghly Mohsin College, the Hooghly College was established on 1st August, 1836 with the money that Haji Mohammad Mohsin left for philanthropic purposes.

9. Commenting on Verse 150 (Book IV) of *The Dunciad* by Alexander Pope ("Words we teach alone"), Joseph Warton says this. See *The Works of Alexander Pope with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* (9 volumes) London: J.F. Dove, 1822. Volume V, 244 for more.

10. What Richardson quotes here has been taken from *The Works of Alexander Pope with Notes and Illustrations by Joseph Warton* (9 volumes) London: J.F. Dove, 1822. Volume V, 245. Joseph Warton while commenting on Verse 157 (Book IV) of *The Dunciad* ("We ply the Memory, we load the brain/Blind rebel Wit, and double chain on chain") paraphrases and quotes from 'Of Education', *Complete Prose Works of Milton* ed. D. Bush et al. New York, 1951-6. II: 400-1.

11. This line has been slightly modified from its original. Oliver Goldsmith in his *Deserted Village* (1770) while describing the village preacher says,

At church, with meek and unaffected grace,  
His looks adorn'd the venerable place;  
Truth from his lips prevail'd with double sway,  
And fools who came to scoff remain'd to pray.

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[Introductory Note and Annotations by Piyali Gupta]

# Preface to Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day<sup>1</sup>

*David Lester Richardson*

[*Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* was a part of the Hindu College syllabus and it had a great contribution in introducing the young Indian student to the English poets and their works. It contained poems (also verse drama) of more than a hundred British poets starting from Chaucer to Ebenezer Elliott. Each poem or drama was preceded by a biographical and critical note on the poet and his or her work. The theoretical premise for the introduction of English education in India that was laid in the previous essay found its practical application in this book. The Preface defines the dual purpose of the work: it indicates the effectiveness of such an anthology in the elevation of the moral character of the Indians by ‘familiariz[ing] their minds with beautiful images and pure and noble thoughts’ and by helping them ‘acquire a thorough knowledge of the language in which the poetry is embodied.’ The long defence of poetry and its noble qualities leads to the main argument, that the colonial subject is in need of ‘moral elevation’ and that need can be fulfilled through a reading of the European texts and languages. The Preface perpetrates the Anglicist agenda and thus is an important document in the history of the colonial education in India.]

The Committee of Public Instruction<sup>2</sup> having experienced the difficulty of procuring a Poetical Class-book for the more advanced students of the Hindu College and other similar institutions under their superintendence, I was requested to prepare a new work especially adapted to the purpose. The scheme of the present publication was accordingly laid before them and it was honored by their approval. Mr. Macaulay, who was then President of the Committee, favored me with several hints of which, with a few exceptions, I readily availed myself, and since his return to England, I have been in occasional communication on the subject of the work with his successor, Sir Edward Ryan<sup>3</sup>, at whose desire I have added to the original plan the Biographical and Critical Notices which precede the selections. I sincerely wish that his excellent suggestion had been turned to a happier account. But the task required more literary leisure, research and meditation than occasional sickness, and daily duties which could not be interrupted, permitted me to bestow upon it. It was not until the Poetical Selections had nearly passed through the press that I

commenced upon the prefatory notices, and there was then so much impatience manifested in different quarters to obtain the work that I fear I have made more haste than is quite compatible with a due regard for my own credit. In the "City of Palaces," works of reference are not easily obtained, and sometimes to avoid delay I have been compelled to pass over a point on which a little research might have thrown a new light.\*\* Rather than keep the press waiting, I have sometimes allowed a sheet to pass through my hands without a sufficiently deliberate revision and every literary man is aware how often a hasty alteration without a careful consideration of the context may mar both the sense and grammar. But with all their imperfections, of which no one can be more painfully sensible than I am, I cannot help thinking that such a connected series of miniature memoirs of all our best poets from the dawn of our literature to the present period will naturally enhance the value of the work, and be highly interesting to the young Hindu student, who would find it impossible to meet elsewhere with a similar chain of poetical biography in a single volume. The chain is indeed slight, but it is unbroken. Nothing of this kind has been hitherto attempted. Chalmers's collection of the British Poets in twenty-one royal octavo volumes,<sup>4</sup> and Anderson's in thirteen,<sup>5</sup> are of course too bulky and expensive to be of the least general use in any scholastic establishment and even these works do not bring down their specimens or biographies later than Beattie. Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets begin with Cowley and end with Lord Lyttleton. Of poetical compilations in one volume those which most nearly resemble the present publication are Southey's Select Works of the British Poets and Aikin's collection under a similar title.<sup>6</sup> Southey's series extends from Chaucer to Lovelace and Aikin's from Ben Jonson to Beattie. Thomas Campbell's compilation entitled Specimens of the British Poets<sup>7</sup> comes nearest to this volume in general design but his work is divided into seven volumes, and though it contains some very just and beautiful criticisms he has been singularly capricious in the distribution of his favors, honoring some poets with a comparatively elaborate memoir and critique and dismissing others with a laconic tombstone memento of their birth and death, Dean Swift, for example, has no other notice than that he lived and died. Campbell's specimens commence with Chaucer and conclude with one poet later than Beattie, namely Christopher Anstey, the author of *The Bath Guide*<sup>8</sup> who died in 1805. Dr. Knox's well-known work, the "Elegant Extracts,"<sup>9</sup> contains a vast quantity of verse, but it is chaotic and fragmental;

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\*\* To save time, I have used an author's privilege to borrow from himself, and in a few instances have repeated some critical remarks which I had published in the *Literary Leaves*.

and the worthy compiler was much too indulgent to bad writers. Hazlitt has left us a collection of specimens *from Chaucer to the latest living poets*.

Campbell has cited a few fragments of dramatic scenes, but Southey, Aikin and Hazlitt have rigidly excluded the drama from their collections. It appeared to me that so important a part of the poetical literature of England ought not to be overlooked, and that to mince Shakespeare's mighty productions into small 'beauties' was not the way to do him justice or to satisfy the reader. Some entire plays therefore have been cited<sup>10</sup> from that prince of poets, and from other great dramatists of the reigns of Elizabeth and James the First. Neither before nor since that period have the English had reason to boast of extraordinary excellence in the serious drama. Addison's *Cato* has been selected as an example of the Frenchified-English school of dramatic declamation. Otway and Rowe, though they are by no means in the highest rank of genius, were entitled to place in a collection of this nature. Amongst the dramatic works of later or living writers no remarkable performances seem to stand out conspicuously for decided preference over all others; the choice was therefore too delicate and perplexing to enable me to fix on any one or two plays for citation, and I could not have afforded room for more. But the omission is of little consequence, as this is by no means a dramatic age, though we have abundance of ready play-wrights, many of whom understand the machinery of the stage. There are others who know how to write very elegant poems in the form of plays, but where shall we look for any large and decided development of the dramatic faculty – that peculiar power which enables a writer to lay aside his own identity and enter the hearts of other men. The poets of the present day are eloquent and impassioned egoists and nobly pourtray [sic] their own characters, but they cannot raise the curtain of any other individual mind. They have no dramatic invention. There is not one essentially new character in all the dramatic poetry of the nineteenth century. A great dramatist soon makes us conscious that the personages to whom he introduces us are genuine specimens of human nature, not a mere repetition of old stage portraits, but transcripts from real life. These never relax their hold upon our memories, and they become at last a portion of our minds. But the dramas of the day leave a vague and indeterminate impression that fades like breath from the polished mirror. Since the time of Shakespeare two centuries and a half, loaded heavily with literary productions have passed away, and yet *Lear* and *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and *Othello* are as fresh as ever! In a third of that period – where will be the plays of the present age?

With the exception of Dr. Knox's "Elegant Extracts," the various poetical compilations to which I have already alluded, have been prepared on the

chronological system which is certainly preferable to every other. Poetry is of too subtle a nature to admit of a minute and rigid classification. The blending together the poetry of different ages for the sake of arranging the pieces according to their subjects or the predominant faculty or feeling displayed in the execution, produces nothing but confusion; while the chronological order gives us at once a clear and general view of the various wealth of our literature, and enables us to trace the history of its birth and progress.

That all readers will be equally satisfied with the propriety of every citation in this volume, is not to be expected. A compiler must not attempt to imitate the painter who tried to please every body and pleased no one. No reader takes up a work of this kind who does not at once feel that he could improve it by some rejection or insertion. He who collects specimens of art, of which the value must always remain a question of taste, would be very unreasonable to expect unqualified approbation from any man who considers himself capable of forming an independent opinion. The compiler himself is not always satisfied with his own selections. He does not invariably take what might seem to him the *best* of an author's works, because it may sometimes happen that want of space compels him to act on a more mechanical principle than the consideration of intrinsic merit. It may be deemed advisable to give a specimen of a poet whose rank does not entitle him to occupy many pages, but whose longest work may be decidedly his best and yet afford no separate passages that could be advantageously extracted. Or it may be necessary to insert a production of little real merit but of great adventitious interest as for example the *Cato* of Addison, which though of small value in itself affords a very fair specimen of the dramatic poetry of the time, and is therefore prominently connected with the history of our literature. It is necessary, that he who wishes to form an impartial and correct opinion of a work of selections should take many things into consideration before he ventures to condemn it.

I ought perhaps, to apologize for the somewhat peremptory tone of the critical remarks in the prefatory Notices; but it is very difficult for any one, however unpretending, to seat himself in the critic's chair without assuming for the time a manner somewhat foreign to his nature. Doubt and indecision seen inconsistent with the dignity of his office, and in compliance with the almost universal custom he speaks as one possessed of supreme authority on all questions of taste. But it is not the public critic who plays these 'fantastic tricks.' In questions so difficult to decide, because so subtle and undefined, as many of those which relate to works of imagination, every man is an authority to himself, and his self-esteem is pretty sure to take the alarm at any difference of opinion. In private society a dispute regarding the merits of a poet has sometimes caused such mortal collision, such a "clash of

arguments and jar of words," that the opposing parties have seemed to threaten each other's annihilation with deadlier weapons. It is natural for a man to protect his opinions with a jealous care, when his taste is called in question by his opponents; and a public critic is often conscious that many of his readers may dispute his decisions and perhaps despise his judgement. A feeling of this nature gives edge to his censures and carries his praise into extravagance. I cannot be sure that I have always escaped such influences myself, but I have at least endeavoured to communicate my own impressions with fidelity and clearness. I have spoken frankly and freely of great men, because great men have nothing to lose by honest criticism, and because every one is entitled to express his opinion, let it be what it may, of the noblest poets of the world. Though the critic himself should be utterly unable to write a single line of tolerable verse, he may yet be a very accurate judge of the production of others. I have tried to weigh praise and censure in the scales of justice and I have been more anxious on this point because there is observable in modern criticism when employed on the intellectual pretensions of men of poetical genius a disposition to run into the opposite extremes of idolatry and contempt. There have been the most startling differences of opinion amongst even the leading intellects of the present age, and young students are so bewildered and perplexed by such conflicting authorities that they know not which guides to trust. One eminent writer for example will not allow that Pope is a poet in any sense of the word, while another thinks him equal, if not superior, to Shakespeare himself. There is surely no presumption in steering between these distant points and pronouncing both parties to be equally in error.

A compilation of this kind has not only to incur the hazard of censure on account of those rigid philosophers who deem the perusal of poetry something worse than a mere waste of time. It is useless to talk of music to the deaf or of colour to the blind; and it is perhaps equally idle to argue with the opponents of the *art divine*, for they are confessedly deficient to that sense of beauty to which poetry is addressed, and which has only been bestowed upon the favorites of nature. To cold and vulgar minds how large a portion of this beautiful world is a dreary blank! They recognize nothing but as uninteresting monotony in the daily aspect of the earth or sky. It is the spirit of poetry which keeps the world fresh and young. To a poetical eye, every morning's sun seems to look rejoicingly on a new creation. Poetry widens the sphere of our purest and most permanent enjoyments. It makes the familiar new, the past present, the distant near. It is the philosopher's stone discovered; it transmutes every thing into gold. "It accommodates," says Lord Bacon, "the shows of things to the desires of the mind."<sup>11</sup> Not that it throws on objects a false appearance, but that it puts them in the happiest point of

view, just as we place a picture or a statue at its proper distance or elevation, that all petty details and slight roughness and imperfections may be lost to the general effect, which is thereby rendered more complete and true. It strikes off all petty experiences, disdains all local prejudices, temporary topics and mere conventionalisms, and goes at once to the heart of those universal questions which interest mankind as human beings.

It has been objected to poetry that it has not always been employed on the side of truth and virtue. But an art is not answerable for its artists, nor a science for its professors. There are men who from some strange obliquity of mind are apt to apply the noblest instruments to the worst of purposes. It is gross injustice to denounce poetry as profane and false because a few of the base and insincere have used its external form for their own wretched ends. He who can pierce beneath the surface is aware that impurity and meanness are inconsistent with the nature of poetry in the highest sense. A forced connection has sometimes been effected between poetry and immorality, but they do not actually amalgamate. Those critics, however, who are so dull of apprehension as to hold fiction and metre to be constituent parts of poetry, and to confound the meanest passages of grovelling prose in verse with those immortal lines which glow with inspiration, must be pitied and forgiven if they see no distinction between the empyrean spirit of poetry itself and the grosser matter with which it may be brought into conjunction. Their error is indeed a melancholy one, but they cannot help it. It is rather their misfortune than their fault. There is an affinity between the purest virtue and those sublime emotions with which the highest poetry is conversant. Our very communion with God, and all our thoughts of another world are poetical in proportion as they are elevated. The pages of the Bible glow with the finest poetry: its holiest parables are poems. Dr. Isaac Watts, whose piety and virtue are beyond suspicion, expresses his surprise that "the profanation and abasement of so divine an art as poetry, should have tempted some weaker Christian to imagine that poetry and vice are naturally akin; or at least that verse is only fit to recommend trifles and entertain our lesser hours." "It is strange," he adds, "that persons who have the Bible in their hands should be led away by thoughtless prejudice to so wild and rash an opinion." He describes poetry as "an art whose sweet insinuations might almost convey piety into resisting nature and melt the hardest souls to virtue."<sup>12</sup> Well might Milton tell us of "*what religions, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of poetry both in divine and human beings.*"<sup>13</sup> His *Paradise Lost* is a noble illustration of the power and majesty of his favorite art. Archbishop Sharp advised all young divines to unite the reading of Shakespeare to the study of the Scriptures and John Wesley, the celebrated Methodist,

recommended his young disciples to add to the study of Bible the perusal of the *Faery Queen* of Spenser.

Poets who have made use of their divine endowment in the cause of vice are like philosophers who have employed their reasoning powers to throw a veil over the conscience; both are equally sensible that their noble gifts are shamefully misused; but neither Poetry nor Philosophy change their original nature whatever may be the sins of the individuals. Has not religion itself been sometimes turned to a bad account? In this our imperfect state the greatest good is easily converted into the greatest evil. We must be content with the preponderance of desirable results. If we are to close the volume of our poetical literature because it is sometimes sullied, we must do the same with our prose.

“Poetry,” says Lord Bacon, “is taken in two senses, or with respect to words and matter. The first is but a character of style and a certain form of speech not relating to the subject; for a true narration may be delivered in verse and a feigned one in prose *but the sound is a capital part of learning, and no other than feigned history.*”<sup>14</sup> Poetry is indeed history – the history of a time; of man, not of men; and its fiction or feigning is only a form of truth. The philosophers who would deem this reason a paradox are like those very unpromising little children who because they have never heard the talk of wolves and lions conclude that Gay’s fables are nothing but wicked falsehoods. Fiction, however false in respect to particular facts, can only charm us by its general truth. It signifies little whether Othello and Iago ever lived and died; it is enough to know that the passions represented under those names still burn and breathe in the human heart. Aristotle justly termed poetry, “a more philosophical thing than history (so called). For poetry is chiefly conversant with *general* truth; history with *particular*.” If literature is of value to the world the poets demand no inconsiderable share of our gratitude and applause. When we look back to the writers of Greece and Rome it is impossible to deny that poetry forms by far the most precious portion of their legacy to mankind. The ancient poets sin less frequently than the ancient historians against the cause of truth. We know that the pictures of general nature by the greatest poets of antiquity are exactly to the life, and even their representations of national and temporary manners have the strangest internal evidence in their favor. But the ancient historians with more importunate calls upon our faith are much less trusted. They relate with gravity, and as if they were on oath, particular facts too ridiculous to deceive the children of the nineteenth century. Even modern historians so mix up truth and falsehood that it is sometimes impossible to distinguish the one from the other. Dr. Johnson said of Robertson’s histories<sup>15</sup> that they were mere romances, and every one knows that Hume’s enchanting narrative can rarely be relied on when his

prejudices are concerned. Sir Walter Raleigh, when he was writing the History of the World, discovered that even they who aim honestly at the collection of particular facts must often despair of obtaining an exact knowledge of even those details which seem most within their reach. He heard the noise of a violent contention under his window, whence he could neither see nor hear distinctly. Of one person after another, as each entered his apartment, he made inquiries concerning the disturbance, but so inconsistent were the several accounts that he was unable to trace the truth. "What," said he, "can I not make myself master of an incident that happened an hour ago under my own window, and shall I imagine I can truly understand the history of Hannibal or Caesar?" There is not this difficulty with respect to the poet's truths. The human heart lies bare before him.

There has been a great deal of vulgar and shallow objection to poetry on the score of its supposed inutility. Because it cannot do everything it has been thought that it can do nothing. Poetry, indeed, does not teach a man how to make a fortune or to feed a starving family. Neither does morality or religion. In a narrow sense of the word Cocker's Arithmetic<sup>16</sup> is more *useful* than Milton's *Paradise Lost*, or the Bible itself. If man's life were merely bestial - if he had no spiritual existence, the objection to poetry would be well founded. The butcher and the baker would be more useful than the poet and the philosopher. But as we have a soul to feed as well as a body the case is widely different. Our happiness depends more upon spirit than on matter. Poetry cannot cure the grief of a bodily wound; but it can administer to a mind diseased, and it can heighten our truest pleasures. "Poetry," says Coleridge, "has been to me its own exceeding great reward. It has soothed my afflictions; it has multiplied and refined my enjoyments; it has endeared solitude; and it has given me the habit of wishing to discover the good and the beautiful in all that meets and surrounds me."<sup>17</sup> It is not poets only who have experienced the useful influence of the Muse. The greatest statesmen and even the most celebrated warriors have felt her charms. Alexander the Great carried the works of Homer about him in a silver box and used to place them under his pillow at night. On the evening before the battle of Quebec, General Wolfe listened with intense delight to the recitation of Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard. "I would rather," exclaimed the hero, "have been the author of that piece than beat the French to-morrow!"<sup>18</sup> He preferred the glory of a poet to that of a conqueror. He was not the worse soldier, however, because he loved the Muse; nor were Fox and Burke less efficient statesmen because they venerated the poet's art.

It is gratifying to find that the most powerful organ of the Utilitarians, the *Westminster Review*, has latterly adopted a far more liberal tone respecting

works of imagination than characterized its earlier numbers. Jeremy Bentham, under some strange misconception of its real nature, has asserted that poetry is "essentially opposed to truth;" but his disciples do not now uphold him in this unhappy error.<sup>\*\*</sup> A *Westminster Reviewer* acknowledges that song is but the eloquence of truth — the truth of our inmost souls — the truth of humanity's essences, brought up from those abysses which exist in every bosom, and just moulded into metre without being concealed or disfigured by the workmanship. Poetry is an essence distilled from the fine arts and liberal sciences; nectar for the gods. It tasks the senses, the fancy. The feelings, and the intellect, and employs the best powers of all in one rich ministry of pleasure. It must be by a rare felicity that the requisite qualities for its production are found in a man; and when they are, we should make much of him — he is a treasure to the world. "So far," says the same reviewer, "from there being any natural incongruity between the reasoning and imaginative faculties, as dunces have always delighted to believe it may rather be affirmed that they have a natural affinity, and rarely attain their full development but when they exist in union.

Poetry improves us by a direct appeal to the finest sensibilities of our nature. It extends our sympathies, and purifies our thoughts. The true lover of the Muse cannot be base and mean without a perpetual struggle against his better nature. It is the part of poetry to lift us above the reach of petty cares and sensual desires, and to make us feel that there is something nobler and more permanent than the ordinary pleasures of the world. It is a species of religion. Poet's are nature's Priests. They lead us "from nature up to nature's God." They "vindicate the ways of God to man." They breathe a soul into the dry bones of moral science, and invest them with an ethereal [sic] beauty. They teach us to

"Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in every thing."<sup>19</sup>

The precepts of a prose writer do not enter the hearts of youthful readers like the living examples on the poet's page. No lecture on guilty ambition leaves so vivid and permanent an impression on the mind as the agony of Macbeth. There is scarcely a moral axiom in prose that has not been inculcated in verse with infinitely greater force. The sentiment which meets with no approbation on the page of the prose moralist is sent alive in the deepest recesses of the soul by the poet's magic. The effect is at once electrical and lasting.

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<sup>\*\*</sup> I have been told by more than one of Jeremy Bentham's intimate friends that he was by no means incapable of being affected by the charms of poetry though he deemed it proper for certain reasons to discountenance it in his public writings.

With respect to the young Hindus, for whom this series of specimens has been chiefly prepared, I exult in the thought that in the performance of my duties at the Hindu College I have already been the means of introducing many of them to a more intimate acquaintance with the writings of our greatest poets than they might otherwise have obtained and I can anticipate no more delightful source of self-reflection in my latest years than the good which may happily be effected by the introduction of this volume into all the Government schools in India. Let it not be apprehended that an undue preference will be bestowed upon poetical studies. A companion prose volume of the same size as the present is now preparing, and is in the hands of Dr. John Grant.<sup>20</sup> His fine taste, his extensive reading and the general character of his mind peculiarly qualify him for the task. After an uninterrupted friendship of nearly twenty years he will excuse the liberty of this public tribute. At the several Government Colleges prose and verse studies are very equally divided. At the Hindu College, for example, Lord Bacon and Shakespeare are read alternately. History, General Literature and English Composition have each their turn, and the exact sciences obtain as they ought to do, a proportionate share of the student's time. There is accordingly no reason to fear that the Indian alumni will be too much absorbed in poetical delights to give the requisite attention to graver studies. At the same time it may be as well to allude to the generally acknowledged fact, that the chief defect at present in the character of the people of India is *a want of moral elevation*. There is little chance of making them too romantic.

Nothing can more effectually beguile men from the circle of mean and selfish thoughts than an art which enriches the mind with lovely images, and intenerates the heart with generous sentiments. "This I have observed," says Feltham, "to the honor of poets, - I never found them covetous or scrapingly base. There is a largeness in their souls beyond the narrowness of other men; and may not this embrace more of heaven and God?"<sup>21</sup> We need not make *poets* of the natives – this is not the object – poets indeed are not to be *made*; but we may cultivate in young minds that fine sense of the true and the beautiful to which poetry administers. At present the majority of those natives who have not received an English education are compelled for want of intellectual resources to spend all their leisure in frivolous and vulgar amusements.

Unknown to them, when sensual pleasures cloy  
To fill the languid pulse with finer joy.<sup>22</sup>

That system of education is essentially defective which is addressed exclusively to the understanding through the medium of science. Science *by itself* is hard and cold. Its influence is ungenial unless accompanied by the study of those glorious arts which through the imagination stir the feelings.

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The heart is at least of as much importance as the head. We should neglect neither. If science may teach us to number and measure the stars of heaven, let poetry teach us to feel their mysterious beauty. He who has clothed the visible universe in light and loveliness could never desire us to be insensible to its glory or to confine our notice of it to measurement and calculation. Let Milton and Shakespeare instruct the young natives of India how to appreciate the beauty which God has lavished upon the creation. He who is so taught has within his reach those sources of pure and serene delight that are wholly inexhaustible. When he quits the struggling crowd and shakes off the cares of life,

The meanest floweret of the vale,  
The simplest note that swells the gale,  
The common sun, the air, the skies,  
To him are opening Paradise.<sup>23</sup>

Let us teach the people of Bengal, who are now too apt to think that the loss of riches is the loss of every thing, that even in penury and distress a mind of true refinement can echo the noble sentiment of Thomson,

I care not, Fortune, what you me deny,  
You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace,  
You cannot shut the windows of the sky  
Through which Aurora shows her brightening face.<sup>24</sup>

The Indian students read our English poets, as English collegians read the poets of Greece or Rome, not only to familiarize their minds with beautiful images and pure and noble thoughts but to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language in which the poetry is embodied. Pope has justly and emphatically asked us —

What can a boy learn sooner than a song?  
*What better teach a foreigner the tongue?*  
What's long and short, each accent where to place,  
And speak in public with some sort of grace?<sup>25</sup>

Passages frequently occur in a course of poetical reading which not only put the student's intellect to the utmost stretch, but afford a severe trial of the teacher's powers of explanation. I allude chiefly to those dream-like and evanescent images of truth and beauty which sometimes float through the minds of thoughtful men and mock all their efforts to retain them, but which the poet knows how to fix for ever in their own ethereal hues. These exquisite revelations of our spiritual nature are peculiarly difficult to explain, for as they are embodied by the poet in the choicest diction they cannot be transferred to prose without sacrificing their more subtle meaning and lowering their lofty tone. This is especially the case when it is necessary to render them intelligible

to an immature capacity. The teacher, in such a case, must be content to let his pupil arrive as nearly as possible at the general meaning. We cannot force a sense of intellectual beauty into the mind of a child. It will come in due time, if his nature be favorable and his teacher skilful.

It is still however advisable to make the young student struggle as hard as he can to discover the purport of what he reads, and even to let a difficult sentence pass through a whole class, that every boy may have his chance of supplying an accurate explanation. There is no mental exercise for the student when assistance is too easily obtained. In some schools the boys read one hundred pages in less time than is taken in others to get through ten; but the latter it cannot be doubted, read to a better purpose. But though it is proper that the student should be thus *severely tasked*, a teacher should avoid all *severity of manner*. A boy cannot reasonably be expected to trace out a hidden meaning when his thoughts are in a state of confusion from the impatience or displeasure of his superior. Even the clearest explanation is thick darkness to an agitated student. "You may as well," says Locke, "try to write on a trembling paper as on a trembling mind."<sup>26</sup>

It is incumbent upon me to mention that the Rev. Mr. Pearce<sup>27</sup>, the late pious and truly amiable secretary of the Calcutta School Book Society<sup>28</sup>, (who have divided with the Committee of Public Instruction the expense of this publication,) was extremely anxious that I should scrupulously omit every line or word in the Selections that might even in the least degree militate against the interests of morality and religion. I have been equally anxious to set up to the spirit of this praise-worthy suggestion. I have often taken the liberty to suppress objectionable passages (indicating the blank with stars),<sup>29</sup> but I could not be so ridiculously presumptuous as to supply their place with words or sentiments of my own. It has sometimes happened that particular passages of which I could not wholly approve were so interwoven with the general texture of the poems that it was impossible to separate them without injury and confusion. In the field of literature a weed is sometimes so closely connected with a flower that one is not to be extracted without the other. I hope however, that the purest minded reader may go through this large volume with very little offence from particular passages or expressions because the general tendency of the poetry is decidedly in favor of virtue and religion. In the words of Bacon, it "serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and delectation."<sup>30</sup> It is of course the duty of every instructor of youth into whose hands this book may fall to point out for suitable reprehension say objectionable thought or word, and to make a due distinction between the pure ore and the dross with which it may be committed. It is equally his duty, however, to avoid confounding a representation of character and manners with

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the personal sentiments of the poet. In the pages of the dramatist especially, are many sentiments and expressions highly obnoxious in themselves, but which are not intended for approval or imitation, but rather for our hatred and avoidance. The writer who professes 'to hold the mirror up to nature and give the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure'<sup>31</sup> cannot consistently confine himself to pleasures of purity and refinement. Even the satirist and the didactic poet must sometimes utter sentiments and language not their own when they aim at a representation of life and manners; and it is if course the height of absurdity and injustice to confound the painter himself with the character he pourtrays [sic]. It is very advisable at the close of each play or poem to call upon the student to give us as well as he can some description of the performance and to deduce the general moral. This practice enforces attention and accustoms the youthful reader to think for himself. The teacher of course must correct his pupil's misapprehensions.

It will be seen at once that the student cannot go regularly through the present volume from the beginning to the end. The earliest selections will be the last read. It is left to the teacher to select at first the easiest pieces of the easiest authors. Perhaps amongst the poets best suited to beginners are Gay, Green, Tickell, Addison, Parnell, Swift, Goldsmith, Cowper, Beattie, Scott, Crabbe, Mrs. Hemans, Rogers, Montgomery and Southey. One great advantage of this collection in a single volume is the temptation it will offer to every student to extend his reading beyond his daily lesson, while the chronological arrangement of the memoirs and specimens will assist him to give unity and completeness to the knowledge he may thus acquire. In this work he has a rich and varied garden of English Poetical Literature spread out before him and he may wander as he lifts from flower to flower luxuriating in pleasures that are followed by no sickening satiety or vain repentance and hiving up a store of nectarean wisdom.

### Notes and References

1. This book, *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* was first published in 1840 under the Authority of the Committee of Public Instruction by Baptist Mission Press. The footnotes in the Preface are Richardson's own.
2. The General Committee of Public Instruction was formed in 1823 at Calcutta for the purpose of ascertaining the state of public education in this part of India, and of the public institutions designed for its promotion, and of considering, and from time to time submitting to Government the suggestion of such measures as it may appear expedient to adopt, with a view to the better instruction of the people, to the introduction among them of useful knowledge, and to the improvement of moral character (*Parliamentary Papers*, House of Commons, 1845: 3).

On July 31, 1823 the following were appointed members of the Committee: (1) Honourable J.H. Harrington (Chairman) (2) J.P. Larkins (3) W.B. Martin (4) W.B. Bayley (5) H. Shakespear (6) H. Mackenzie (7) H.T. Prinsep (8) J.C. Sutherland (9) A. Stirling (10) H.H. Wilson (Secretary). (Peary Chand Mittra, *A Biographical Sketch of David Hare*. First published 1878. Kolkata: Jijnasa, 1979: 13).

3. Sir Edward Ryan (1793-1875) was a member of the Senate of the University of London, and of the council of the University College. He became the Chief Justice at Calcutta, and later one of the controllers of the Exchequer and a Puisne Judge. In 1843 he was sworn a Privy Councillor, and in 1846, he was appointed a Commissioner of Railways. (*New York Times*, August 25, 1875). He sided with the Anglicists like Macaulay and Charles Trevelyan in their crusade for English education in India. From 1835, the three of them worked together in the General Committee of Public Instruction until Macaulay and Trevelyan left for England in 1838 when Ryan took over as President of the committee.
4. Alexander Chalmers (1759-1834) was a Scottish editor and biographer best known for his *General Biographical Dictionary* (1812-17), a 32-volume work first published in 11 volumes (1761). Richardson however talks about *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper, including the series edited with prefaces, biographical and critical, by Dr. Samuel Johnson: and the most approved translations*. 21 Vols. (London: J. Johnson, 1810)
5. Robert Anderson, *A Complete Edition of the Poets of Great Britain*. 13 Vols. (London: John and Arthur Arch, 1793-95).
6. Robert Southey, *Select Works of the British Poets, from Chaucer to Jonson, with Biographical Sketches* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1831). Dr John Aikin (1747-1822) was an English doctor and author. His celebrated works include *General Biography* (10 volumes, 1799-1815) and *Select Works of the British Poets. With Biographical and Critical Prefaces*. London, Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1820. It is obvious that Richardson refers to the latter.
7. Thomas Campbell, ed., *Specimens of the British Poets; With Biographical and Critical Notices, and An Essay on English Poetry* (London: John Murray, 1819).
8. Christopher Anstey (1724-1805) was an English writer and poet. He is remembered chiefly for the humourous and satiric portrait of the Bath society in *The New Bath Guide* (1766), a series of poetical episodes depicting contemporary life at Bath.
9. Vicesimus Knox (1752 - 1821) was an English essayist and minister. He is known for *The Elegant Extracts: or, useful and entertaining Pieces of Poetry, Selected for the Improvement of Young Persons: being similar in Design to Elegant Extracts in Prose*. 2 Volumes (London: C. Robinson; Weybridge: S. Hamilton, 1809).
10. Among these entire plays are Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philasteir*, *The*

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*Faithful Shepherdess*, Philip Massinger's *Guiles Overreach* and Ben Jonson's *Volpone*.

11. This has been taken from the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) Book II, Chap. XIII, where Bacon says:

...it [Poetry] was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind into the nature of things (*Advancement of Learning* ed. G.W. Kitchin. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1954: 32).

12. The Preface to Dr. Isaac Watts's 'Horae Lyricae' (1706) contains these lines.
13. In a famous passage from the tract "Of Education," Milton, outlines a *paedeia* of studies by which young boys are to be formed into governors, counsellors and clergymen. He chooses the curriculum of his ideal school thus:

Logic therefore so much as is usefull, is to be referr'd to this due place withall her well coucht heads and Topics, untill it be time to open her contracted palm into a gracefull and ornate Rhetorick taught out of the rule of *Plato*, *Aristotle*, *Phalareus*, *Cicero*, *Hermongenes*, *Longinus*. To which Poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed rather precedent, as being lesse subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate. I mean not here the prosody of a verse... but that sublime art which in *Aristotle's poetics*, in *Horace*, and the *Italian* commentaries of *Castelvetro*, *Tasso*, *Mazzoni*, and others, teaches what the laws are of a true *Epic* poem, what of a *Dramatic*, what of a *Lyric*, what decorum is, which is the grand master peece to observe. This would... shew them, what Religious, what glorious and magnificent use might be made of Poetry both in divine and humane things. (Milton, John. *Complete Prose*, ed. Don M. Wolfe, et. al., 8 vols. New Haven and London, 1953-82. II : 402-6)

14. In the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) Book II, Chap. XIII, Bacon says:  
Poesy is a part of learning in measure of words for the most part restrained, but in all other points extremely licensed, and doth truly refer to the imagination; which, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined; and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things;
- PICTORIBUS ATQUE POETIS, ETC. It is taken in two senses in respect of words or matter; in the first sense it is but a character of style, and belongeth to arts of speech, and is not pertinent for the present: in the latter it is, as hath been said, one of the principal portions of learning, and is nothing else but feigned history, which may be styled as well in prose as in verse (*Advancement of Learning* ed. G.W. Kitchin. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1954: 32).

15. William Robertson (1721-1793) was a Scottish historian who is renowned for his *History of Scotland 1542-1603* (1759), *History of Charles V* (1769) and *History of America* (1777).
16. Edward Cocker (1631-1676) was the reputed author of the famous *Arithmetick* which was published after his death in 1678.
17. The Preface to *The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Volume VII (ed. Professor Shedd. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1854: vii) contains these lines.
18. This anecdote is narrated in the *Memoir of the Life, Writings, and Correspondence of James Currie* (ed. William Wallace Currie. London: Longman, Rees, Orme and Green, 1831):

I supped at Professor Robison's last week, and spent a very agreeable evening I had some interesting conversation with him...He told me that General Wolfe kept his intention of attacking Quebec a most profound secret; not even disclosing it to the Second in Command, and that the night before the attack nothing was known. The boats were ordered to drop down the St. Lawrence, and it happened that the boat which Professor Robison, then a midshipman commanded, was very near the one General Wolfe was in. A gentleman was repeating Gray's Elegy to the latter, and Mr. Robison heard him (the General) say, "I would rather have been the author of that piece than beat the French tomorrow;" and from this remark guessed that the attack was to me made the next day (II: 248).

In an article in *The Athenaeum* (London. July 23, 1904) "Wolfe and Gray's 'Elegy,' " John G. Gerard interrogates the 'version popularized by such writers as Lord Stanhope, Carlyle, Parkman, and their numerous copyists' in which 'a grossly improbable element is introduced.' These were versions in which Robison narrates the poem and he is on the same boat as Wolfe. He is also sceptical about the versions of Walter Scott and Professor Playfair. Currie's version though doubted by Gerard is the one that comes close to being the truth.

19. These lines have been taken from *As you Like It* (Act II Sc 1: 16-17).
20. Dr. John Grant was a surgeon who was the President of the Committee appointed by William Bentinck in Bengal to report on the state of medical education and also to suggest whether teaching of indigenous system should be discontinued. The Committee consisted of J C. C. Sutherland, C. E. Trevelyan, Thomas Spens, M J Bramley and Ram Comul Sen as members.
21. Owen Felltham's "Of Poets and Poetry" in *Resolves, Divine, Moral, Political* (Cambridge: Hillard and Brown, 1832: 30) contains the quoted lines.
22. These lines are from Oliver Goldsmith's poem *The Traveller or a Prospect of Society* (1765). The lines in the original poem are: "Unknown to them, when sensual pleasures cloy/To fill the languid pause with finer joy." Richardson here

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replaces 'pause' with 'pulse.' He does this also in *Literary Leaves or Prose and Verse chiefly written in India* (1840). In talking about the special qualities of a poet, he says,

It is true that poets possess an exquisite pleasure unknown to common minds, but this peculiar enjoyment being of a purely intellectual character cannot of course render them wholly independent of the pressure of life's daily cares. And yet how much is lost to the cold despisers of works of imagination, even with all the advantages of worldly prosperity!

"Unknown to them, when sensual pleasures cloy  
To fill the languid pulse with finer joy" (*Literary Leaves* 57)

23. These lines belong to Thomas Gray's poem "Ode on the Pleasure Arising from Vicissitude." (1775).
24. These lines have been taken from James Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence* (1748).
25. Taken from Alexander Pope's *Imitations of Horace* (1737), the lines as written by Pope were:

What will a child learn sooner than a song?  
What better teach a foreigner the tongue?  
What's long or short, each accent where to place,  
And speak in public with some sort of grace.

The changes and the emphasis have been done by Richardson.

26. Richardson perhaps alludes to these lines from Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693): " 'Tis as impossible to draw fair and regular Characters on a trembling Mind as on a shaking Paper."
27. Rev. W.H. Pearce (1794-1840), son of Rev. S. Pearce, founder of the Baptist Mission Press in Calcutta, arrived in India in 1817. He was associated with the formation of the Calcutta School Society and was also the Secretary for some time. He composed and translated several tracts and books especially pertaining to female education.
28. The Calcutta School Book Society was founded at a meeting held at the College of Fort William on May 6, 1817 for "the preparation, publication and cheap or gratuitous supply of useful school books, other than religious, in English and Oriental languages" (*Calcutta Review* Volume II No. 1, July 1976: 101). The President was Sir E. Ryan and the committee had members like Dwarkanath Tagore, Kasi Prasad Ghosh, Radhakanta Deb, Ram Comul Sen, C.H. Cameron, D. McFarlane, J. Prinsep, C.E. Trevelyan and others. The committee was divided into three sub-committees of which one was for the establishment and support of a limited number of regular schools, another for helping and improving the indigenous schools and the third for education of a few pupils in English.
29. The blank with stars (\* \* \* \*) appears in *Hamlet* (Act III Sc ii: 99-107) where the portion that has been deleted is:

Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap? *[Lying down at Ophelia's feet]*

Ophelia: No, my lord.

Hamlet: I mean, my head upon your lap?

Ophelia: Ay, my lord.

Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?

Ophelia: I think nothing, my lord.

Hamlet. That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs.

Ophelia: What is, my lord?

Hamlet: Nothing.

Such a blank also appears at a very interesting portion in *Othello* (Act I Sc i: 88-90) where the omitted part is:

Iago: Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;  
Even now, now, very now, an old black ram  
Is topping your white ewe.

These blanks also occur in *Macbeth* - Porter Scene(Act II Sc ii: 22-37) and in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (Act I Sc ii).

30. In the *Advancement of Learning* (1605) Book II, Chap. XIII Bacon says that, ...true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence: because true history representeth actions and events more ordinary, and less interchanged, therefore poesy endueth them with more rareness, and more unexpected and alternative variations: so as it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation. (*Advancement of Learning* ed. G.W. Kitchin. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1954: 32).
31. This was Hamlet's advice to the players (Act III Sc ii: 16-22):  
Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

[Introductory Note and Annotations by Piyali Gupta]

## Specimens from “British Indian Poetry”<sup>1</sup>

### The Dying Hindoo<sup>2</sup>

*Emma Roberts<sup>3</sup>*

He lies beside the sacred river,  
    His heart has lost life’s ruddy glow,  
His sighs are faint, his pulses quiver,  
    And death’s chill damps are on his brow.

Within yon green and bowery glade  
    Whose path the smile sunshine wears,  
Beneath the lofty palm tree’s shade  
    His loved though lowly hut appears.

And near him well known sounds arise  
    With joyous songs and laughter fraught,  
And now his glazed and languid eyes  
    Turn faintly towards the village ghaut.

There all is cheerful, as of yore,  
    When with the sun’s declining beam  
He too had sought the Ganges’ shore,  
    And bathed within its hallowed stream.

In crowds his early friends repair  
    To the *chabootur’s* esplanade:  
Her graceful *ghurrah* filling there,  
    Stoops to the brink his dark-eyed maid.

They heed him not – no fond farewells  
    Attest their grief, no tears are shed,  
No sigh the heart’s deep anguish tells;  
    He to the living world is dead.

One pang has shot across his breast –  
    One human pang – but it is gone,  
And tranquility he sinks to rest,  
    As the eternal wave flows on.

His eye the blushing wreath has caught  
    Which floats along the sacred wave,  
And to his parting soul has brought  
    Hopes of bright lands beyond the grave.

Soon shall the form o'er that pure tide  
 Which now to earth so fondly clings,  
 Freed from each grovelling trammel glide,  
 And mingle with its holy springs.

The red crown of lotus wreath  
 Upon the molten silver blushes,  
 And a dark, lifeless form beneath  
 With the stream's headlong-current rushes.

The corse, the flower are seen no more,  
 For ever lost in yon bright river,  
 The echoes of the lonely shore  
 In mournful tone repeat – for ever!

#### Notes to the Dying Hindoo<sup>4</sup> :

There are a few things more shocking to the European eyes than the publicity of death-bed scenes in India, and the apathetical indifference displayed by the Hindoos while attending the expiring moments of their nearest relatives or friends. Frequently, only a few yards from a crowded ghaut thronged by the inhabitants of some neighbouring village, who are laughing, singing, and following their ordinary occupations with the utmost gaiety, a dying person may be seen stretched upon a *charpoy* (bedstead) close to the river's brink, surrounded by a group of three or four individuals, who look upon the sufferer without the slightest appearance of interest. As soon as the breath has left the body, the corse is thrown into the river, death being often precipitated by stuffing the mouth and nostrils with mud. Strangers, attracted by some superb lotus floating down the stream, are disgusted by the sight of a dead body rapidly descending with the tide, the ghastly head appearing above the surface of the water. Every Hindoo is anxious to draw his last sigh on the banks of the Ganges, or some equally sacred stream flowing into its holy waters; the relatives therefore of expiring persons fulfil the last offices of humanity in the manner most desirable to them, by bringing a dying friend to the edge of the river, and consigning the body, when the vital spark has fled, to the hallowed stream. The corse [sic] of a rich Hindoo is burned upon a funeral pile; but as wood is dear, the poorer classes either dispense with it entirely, or merely scorch the flesh previously to launching it in the river.

#### "To the chubootur's esplanade."

The chubootur is a raised terrace formed of *chunam*, a composition of clay so well tempered as to take so fine a polish as marble. From these chubootur's

a flight of stone or chunam steps descend into the river, and compose the ghauts or landing places, which are shaded by a majestic banian or tamarind tree, and accompanied by a mosque or pagoda, or a series of small white *mhuts*.

**"Her graceful ghurrah filling there."**

The *ghurrah* is a coarse earthen water-pot of an elegant shape. It appears in Mr. Westmacott's (the celebrated sculptor) marble statue of a Hindoo girl seated, and has been very naturally mistaken for an urn. The attitude of the female figure of the group alluded to, is not that of a native of Hindoostan.

**"Freed from each grovelling trammel glide,  
And mingle with its holy springs."**

Should the patient who has been dedicated to the sacred river, recover from his malady, he loses *caste*- none of his tribe will associate with a man rejected by the Ganges.

**Notes and References**

1. David Lester Richardson in his anthology *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* (1840) appended a section called "British Indian Poetry" and he explained it thus – 'Specimens of British Poets once or still Resident in the East Indies.' In this group we have poems written by Dr. John Leyden, Reginald Heber, Henry Meredith Parker, John W.M. Kaye, James Atkinson, W.F. Thompson, Rev James Lawson, Emma Roberts, D.L. Richardson and others. Then there is a section called "Poems by an East Indian" that immediately follows the "British Indian Poetry." In it we have three poems by Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-1831): 'To India – My Native Land,' 'Sonnet to the Students at the Hindu College' and an 'Ode from the Persian of Hafiz.' It is followed by "Poem by a Hindu", Kasiprashad Ghosh called 'The Boatman's Song to Ganga.'
2. This poem first published in *Oriental Scenes, Sketches and Tales* [in verse] (London: Edward Bull, 1832: 39-41) was included by David Lester Richardson in his anthology *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* (II: 1518).
3. Emma Roberts (1794? – 1840) came to India in 1828 after her mother's death. She was accompanied by her sister and brother-in-law, Captain Robert Adair McNaghten of the Sixty-first Bengal Infantry. During her stay, she visited Agra, Kanpur and Itawa. She wrote about these places in the *Asiatic Journal*. Her works include *Memoirs of the Rival Houses of York and Lancaster or The White and Red Roses* (1827), *Scenes and Characteristics of Hindostan, with Sketches of Anglo-Indian Society* (1835).
4. These notes had been appended to the original text by Emma Roberts (171-3). Richardson however omits them in his collection.

Suttee<sup>1</sup>*David Lester Richardson*

Her last fond wishes breathed — a farewell smile  
 Is lingering on the calm unclouded brow  
 Of yon deluded victim. Firmly now  
 She mounts, with dauntless mien, the funeral pile.  
 Where lies her earthly Lord. The Brahmin's guile  
 Hath wrought its will — fraternal hands bestow  
 The flaming brand — the crackling embers glow —  
 And flakes of hideous smoke the skies defile!  
 The ruthless throng their willing aid supply  
 And pour the kindling oil. The stunning sound  
 Of dissonant drums — the Priest's exulting cry —  
 The failing martyr's pleading voice have drown'd,  
 While fiercely-burning rafters fall around  
 And shroud her form from Horror's straining eye!

**Note:**

The Suttee is the self-immolation of a Hindoo widow, on the funeral pile of her husband. This sacrifice is not explicitly enjoined by the shasters or sacred writings of the Hindoos as actually necessary to salvation. Many well-informed Natives, among whom is the learned Brahmin, and ardent philanthropist Rammohun Roy have objected to the practice, as not only abhorrent to humanity, but as altogether contradictory to the fundamental doctrines of their faith. Though a widow is seldom compelled to destroy herself, yet, having once offered to do so, neither tears nor intreaties, should her resolution fail her, will have any effect on the priest or her relatives. She is bound to the funeral pile, and surrounded by the faggots, in spite of all her exertions. If by any extraordinary chance she should escape from the fire, she would be punished by the loss of her caste, and considered a disgrace to her family and friends.

**Note and Reference**

1. This poem with the note appeared in *The Oriental Herald and Journal of General Literature* Number 37 Volume 12, edited and published by James S. Buckingham (London, 1827: 511). Then it also appeared in Richardson's *Literary Leaves; or, Prose and verse chiefly written in India* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1836: 303). Richardson also anthologized it in *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* (II: 1492) in the section titled "British Indian Poetry." In the later two instances the poem was published without the note.

The Widow of the Mysore Hill<sup>1</sup>  
*A Fact.*

**Henry Meredith Parker<sup>2</sup>**

The way was rough, the night was chill,  
Darkness was falling on the hill,  
When I heard a woman making moan;  
Bitterly bitterly, wept she,  
Sitting upon a worn grey stone  
By a blighted Banyan tree.

In the monsoon's drear cloudy sky  
The lightning glimmered silently;  
The hot breeze with the day had died,  
The thunder slumber'd on its throne;  
No sound was on the mountain's side,  
Save that poor woman's moan.

"He is fallen! He is gone!  
In the world I am left alone,  
Ah! – would I were alone – for then!"  
Darkly she glanced at the pool, which lay  
Dim and deep in a rocky glen,  
Then shuddering, turn'd away.

"Alas! My helpless babes," said she,  
And rose, still weeping bitterly;  
I am selfish in my lonely grief,  
But the bright Moslem host, from thrones  
Beyond those clouds, will send relief  
To my bereaved ones.

"E'en now their father greets the bold  
Who battled by his side of old,  
When o'er the land the burning star  
Of Islam pour'd its dazzling light,  
And conquering Hyder to the war  
Rush'd, with a tempest's might.

"Poor children! – they will never more  
At sunset, by our cottage-door,

In mimic combat learn to wield  
 Their father's glittering scimitar  
 Ah! dim will be the bright black shield  
 Of my poor Sillahdar.\*

“His lance hangs rusting on the wall,  
 His steed has broken from his stall,  
 And those brave boys, who were to rein  
 His gallant horse, and draw his bow,  
 Gaze on them sadly, and in vain,  
 They have no father now!

“Even now hey weep, and wonder why  
 Out cot is dark, and I do not nigh:  
 Oh, it is hard to bear!” she cried,  
 Then slowly, through the deepening gloom  
 She glided down the mountain’s side  
 Like a spirit to its tomb.

### Notes and References

1. This poem appears in Richardson’s collection *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* (II: 1484-5) in the section titled “British Indian Poetry.” Set against the backdrop of the Anglo-Mysore war, we have a widow mourning the death of her soldier husband. Parker’s representation of the distressed widow and her helplessness that force her to commit suicide is an indictment of the colonial rule.
2. All that we know of Henry Meredith Parker (1796?-1868) from Richardson is that he is the author of *The Draught and Other Poems*. He was a violinist at the Covent Garden Theatre in his youth. He obtained a clerkship at the commissariat in the Peninsula on Lord Moira’s recommendation, then he entered the Bengal Civil Service, and finally became a member of the Calcutta Board of Customs, Salt and Opium. He retired in 1842. He authored *The Draught of Immortality and Other Poems* (1827) and *Bole Ponjis* (1851). Rosinka Chaudhuri informs us that his first work was ‘based on a theme taken from the Mahabharata’ and it incorporated ‘many Hindu mythological motifs and much Sanskrit etymology elucidated in footnotes’ (*Gentleman Poets of Colonial Bengal: Emergent Nationalism and the Orientalist Project*. Kolkata: Seagull, 2002: 36-7). His second work was a reaction against the “orientalizing of tastes, warning his reader against wandering ‘into realms of Orientalism.’ ‘In it he attempted to ‘portray ‘the simple prosaic East of this every day world’’ (*Ibid*).

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\*A Mysore horse-soldier (Annotated thus in the original text by Parker himself).

**A Bengal Picture<sup>1</sup>**

*Rev. James Lawson<sup>2</sup>*

Paint now an azure sky without a cloud;  
Throw in the distance mists and jungle shade;  
Sketch tall thin trunks faint gleaming from the glade,  
And cocoa-nuts high to wring, plumed and proud  
Beneath shall be a hovel, and a crowd  
Of bronzed dwellers, where the thatch doth fade  
From golden yellow to each dingy grade,  
And blue smoke curls about till it doth shroud  
The idle groups. Next on the foreground see  
Two ragged horses just released from toil,  
Browsing upon the fragrant straw wisps, while  
The creaking carriage waits for company.  
Now add a sunshine varnish. There – 'tis done,  
A Bengal sketch – not sooner seen than known.

**Notes and References**

1. This poem appears in Richardson’s collection *Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day* (II: 1516) in the section titled “British Indian Poetry.” The poem similar to several other representations of the Orient presents a decadent Bengal with ‘idle groups,’ ‘ragged horses’ and faint light in ‘jungle shade[s].’
2. Rev. James Lawson (1787-1825) as Richardson informs us, is the author of *The Maniac and Other Poems* (1811).

[Annotations by Piyali Gupta unless otherwise mentioned].

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